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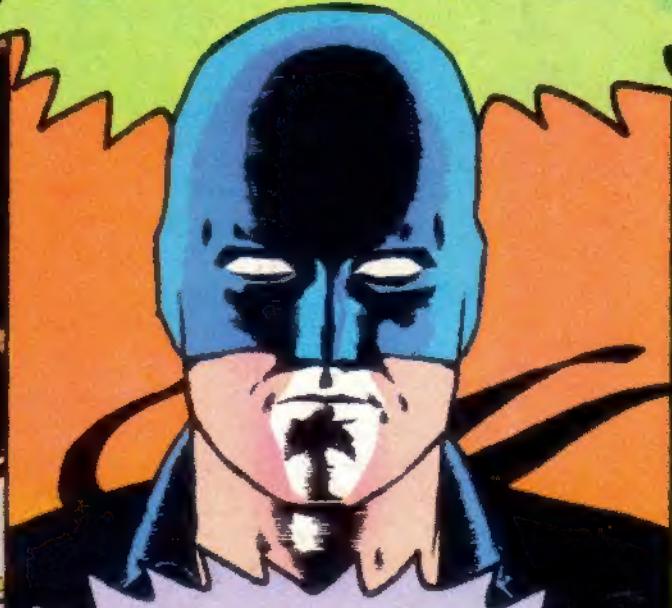
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2

Thrilling  
**DETECTIVE**  
ADVENTURES™

by Max Collins and Terry Beatty



IN THIS ISSUE!  
THE INCREDIBLE  
THE **ORIGIN** OF  
**SCYTHE**™



Plus-

FAMOUS DETECTIVE PIN-UP  
BY **FRANK MILLER!**

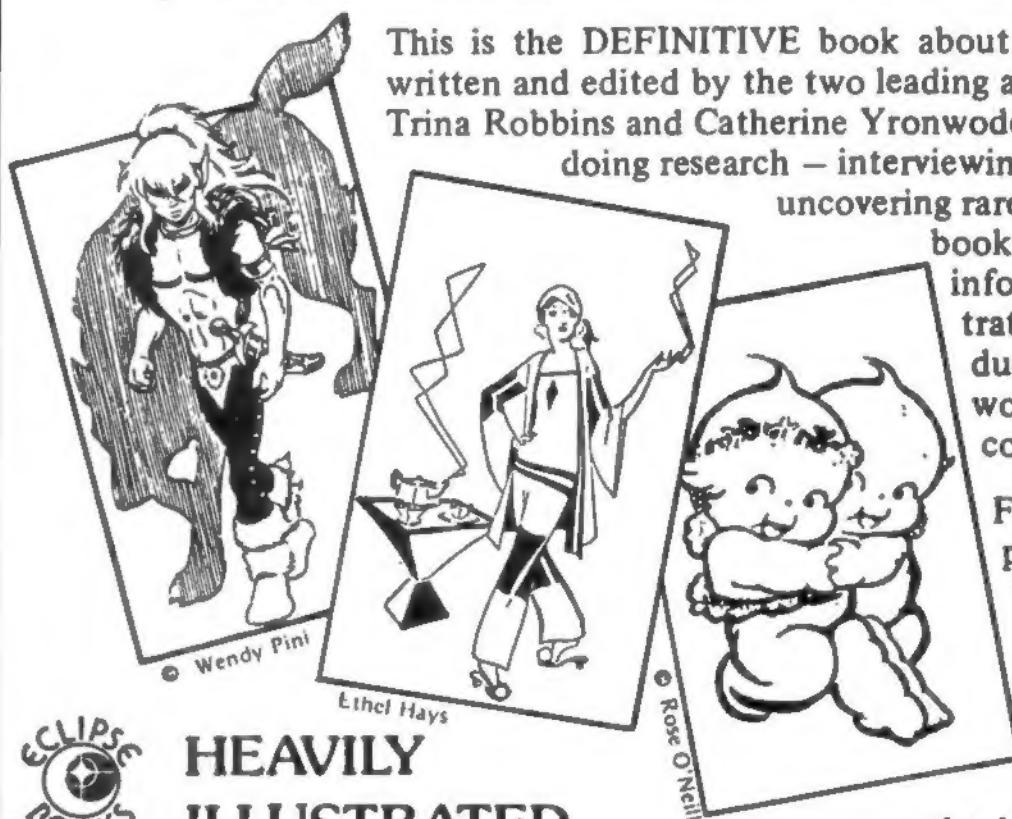
and

**THE MIKE MIST**  
MINUTE  
MIST-ERIES™

# WOMEN AND THE COMICS

by **TRINA ROBBINS AND CATHERINE YRONWODE**

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Mr.

"DEATH DO US PART"

**TREE**

by Max  
Collins and Terry  
Beatty

Colored by Petra Goldberg

Chapter  
Four

# GOING DOWN

©1983  
Max Collins  
and  
Terry  
Beatty

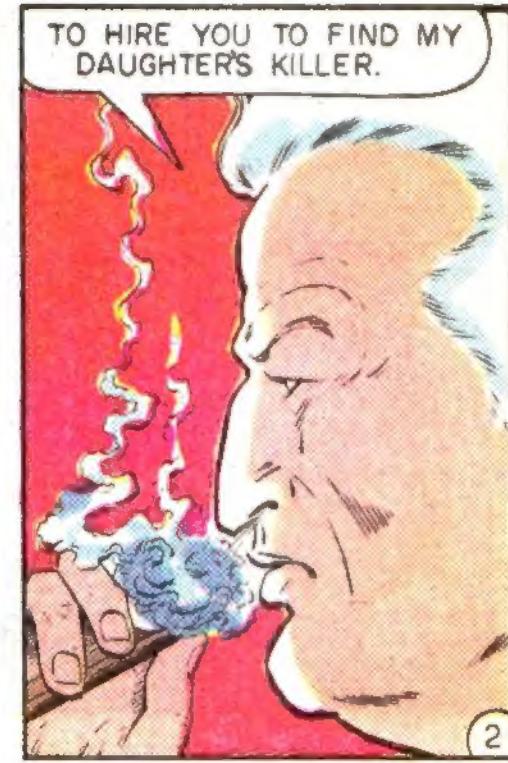
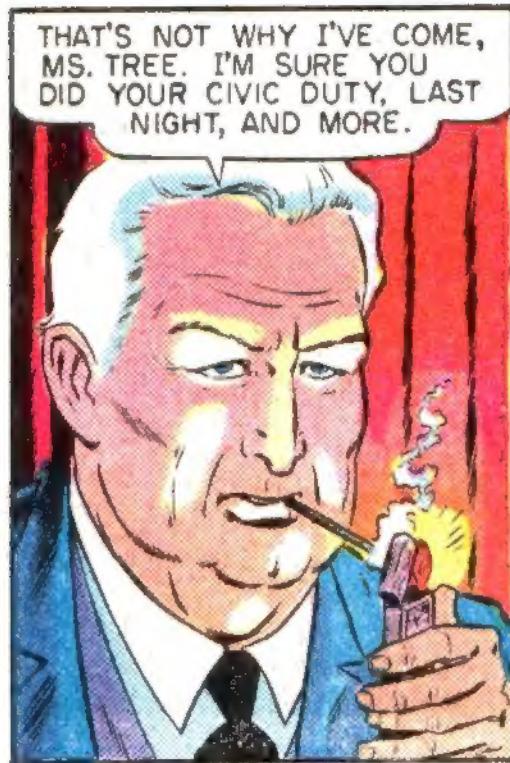
I DIDN'T KNOW IT  
AT THE TIME...

BUT SOMEWHERE WITHIN MY BUILDING...



AN "ACTOR" WAS PREPARING FOR HIS NEXT  
PERFORMANCE — DIFFERENT COSTUME,  
SAME ROLE.





MR. MUERTA - I ADMIT HAVING A CERTAIN PERSONAL INTEREST IN THIS CASE, HAVING BEEN ON THE SCENE...



AND HAVING SURVIVED A VIOLENT HONEYMOON OF YOUR OWN - IF YOU'LL FORGIVE MY MENTIONING WHAT IS I'M SURE A SENSITIVE SUBJECT.



WHAT MAKES YOU THINK CAPTAIN MEYERS WON'T FIND THE KILLER HIMSELF?



"WE BOTH KNOW THAT THE MAN TECHNICALLY RESPONSIBLE IS A PROFESSIONAL," FRANCESCO MUERTA SAID.



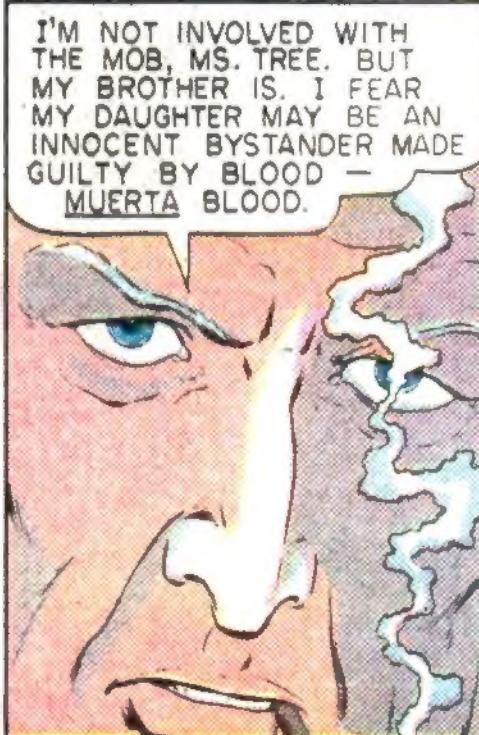
I WANT HIM, OF COURSE - BUT I WANT WHOEVER HIRED HIM MORE. CAPTAIN MEYERS, GOOD MAN THOUGH HE SEEMS TO BE, COULD NEVER GET THAT FAR.



BECAUSE THIS IS A MOB KILLING? IS THAT THE LINE YOU WANT ME TO READ BETWEEN?



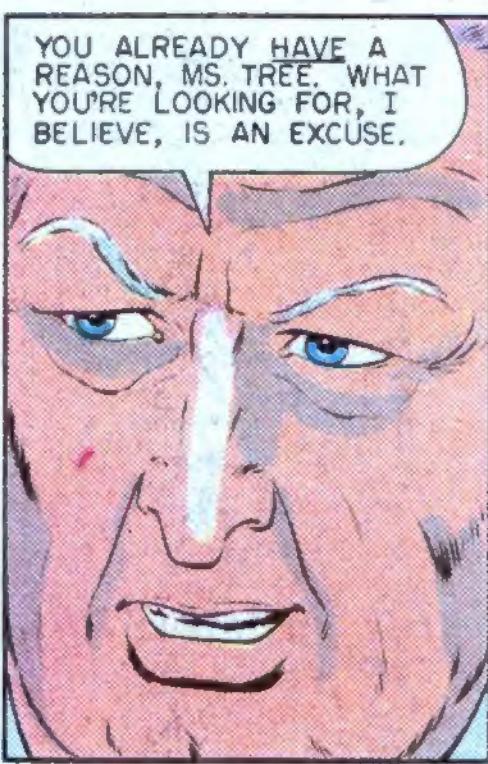
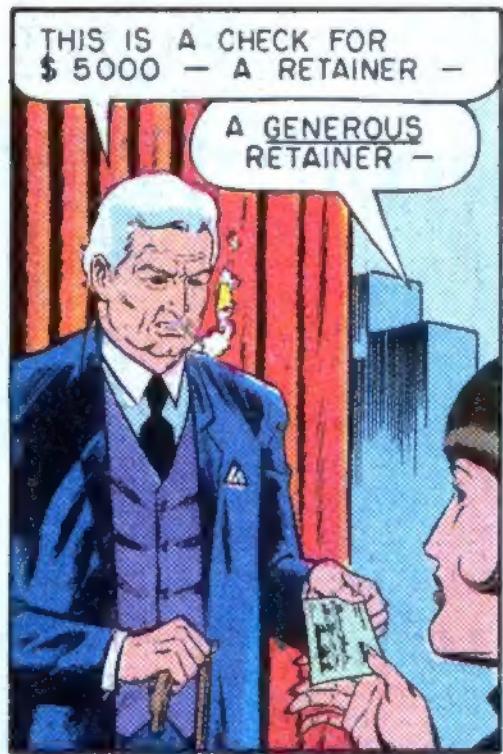
I'M NOT INVOLVED WITH THE MOB, MS. TREE. BUT MY BROTHER IS. I FEAR MY DAUGHTER MAY BE AN INNOCENT BYSTANDER MADE GUILTY BY BLOOD - MUERTA BLOOD.



THEN WHY NOT ASK YOUR BROTHER TO FIND OUT WHO'S RESPONSIBLE FOR HER MURDER?



BECAUSE HE MAY BE RESPONSIBLE.



HERE'S A CHECK TO BANK, EFFIE - AND DRAW UP OUR STANDARD CONTRACT FOR THE SIGNATOR...

DO YOU WANT THAT CONTRACT YET TODAY, MS. TREE?

I GUESS IT IS QUITTING TIME, AT THAT - FIRST THING IN THE MORNING'LL BE FINE, EFFIE.



WASN'T THAT THE MUERTA GIRL'S OLD MAN? DON'T TELL ME YOU GOT HIM TO UNDERWRITE YOUR LATEST CRUSADE -

HOW 'BOUT GRABBING SOME SUPPER WITH US, MS. TREE? YOU CAN FILL US IN...



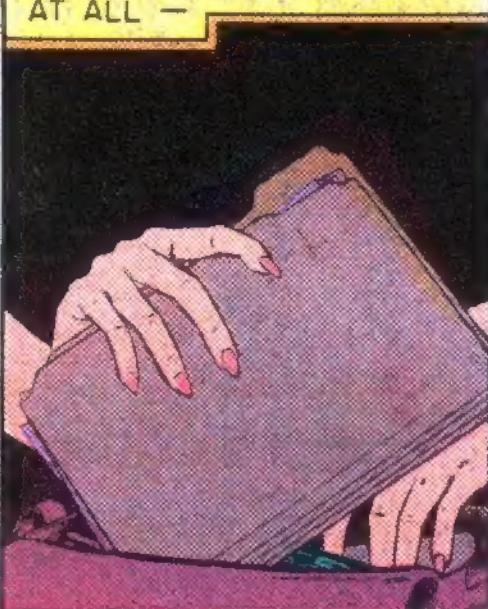
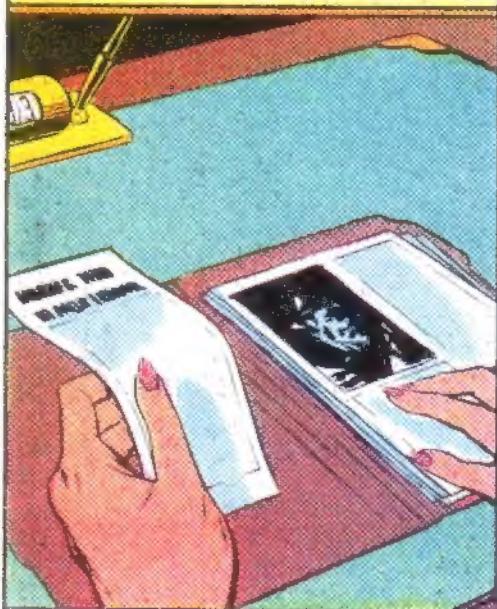
OKAY, OKAY - I'LL MEET YOU GUYS AT DIAMONDS, IN HALF AN HOUR - I WANT TO GATHER UP SOME THINGS.

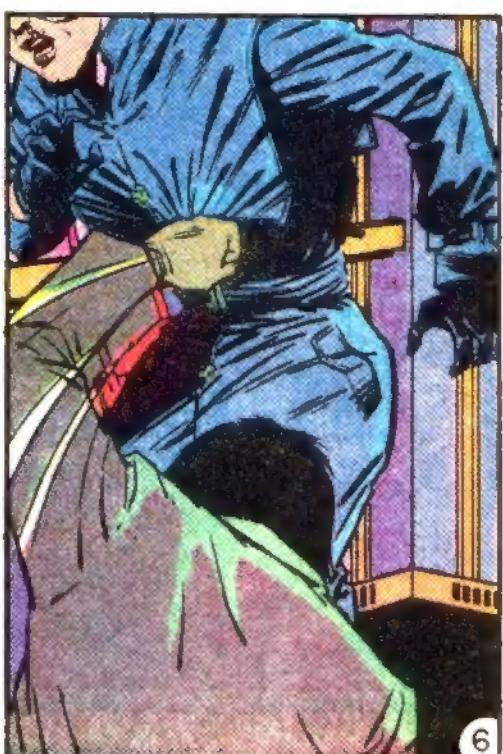
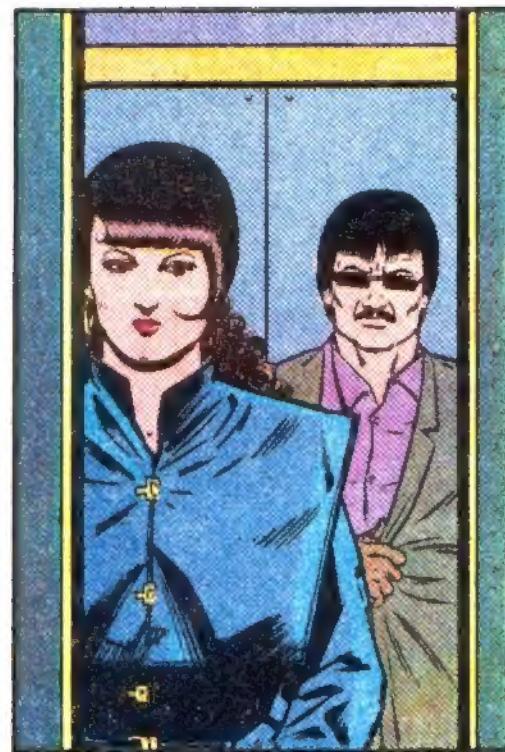


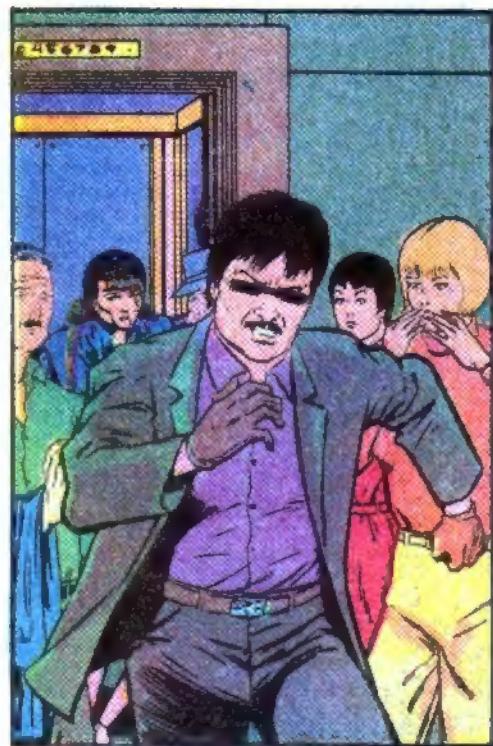
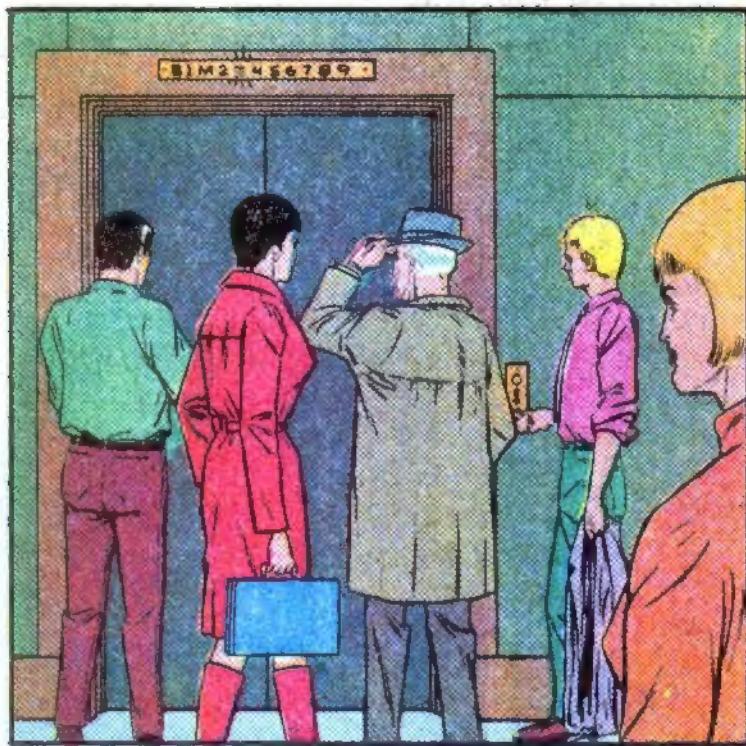
I'D BEEN KEEPING A CLIP FILE ON THE MOB - AS WELL AS PHOTOCOPIES FROM NEWSPAPER FILE MICROFILM...

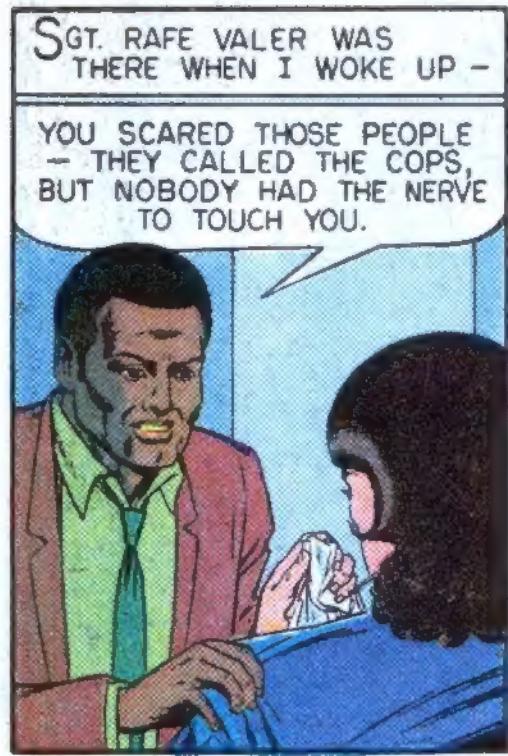
I WANTED TO GO THROUGH 'EM THAT NIGHT, AT HOME, TO SEE IF FRANCESCO MUERTA'S NAME TURNED UP AT ALL -

AND I'D CHECK WITH SGT. VALER, TOO, TO SEE IF HE KNEW WHETHER THIS MUERTA REALLY WAS THE MOB VIRGIN HE CLAIMED TO BE.











Please send your letters to:  
**SWAK**  
Eclipse Comics  
105 Austin Avenue  
Columbia, MO 65201

Dear Max and Terry,

I picked up a stack of new comics recently to catch up on what's happening. Reading them was hard work until I came to **Ms. Tree**.

I hope your simple layouts, clearly composed panels, and good story-telling influence other cartoonists and that you are rewarded with the success you've earned the right to.

LEONARD RIFAS, San Francisco, CA  
Cartoonist Leonard Ritas is the guiding force behind Educomics, whose latest publication, Keiji Nakazawa's **I Saw It** (\$2 plus \$1, Educomics, Box 40246, San Francisco, CA 94140) is highly recommended. Nakazawa's masterpiece, **Barefoot Gen**, is also available in two thick volumes from Educomics at \$6 each, an incredible bargain for some of the most vivid, moving, beautifully-told comics ever.

Dear SWAK,

Ms. Tree's transition from the **Eclipse** series into her own comic book is a smashing success—albeit "long overdue."

I gotta tell you how pleased I was to find 24 full color pages of my favorite blood 'n' guts female in the flesh in #1. The color looks real good, creating stark, surreal tones for Ms. Tree's fateful beach scenes.

I have a feeling that Caniff, Ditko, EC comics and Undergrounds figured prominently in Beatty's formative years. Ms. Tree is a classic doll—based on a real film fox, right? After the EC feeling subsides, the book enjoys a look of simple cartooning styles which have been overlooked by too many "fans."

Collins' "experiment in coherence" succeeds on many levels; the mystery, the avenging woman, Ms. Tree's psychodrama and the sportive love story all weave an interesting, often striking narrative. I enjoyed the Spillane and literary references and the tough characters.

BARRY LUEBBERT, Los Gatos, CA  
Barry, Ms. Tree is physically patterned after a movie "goddess"—the young Lana Turner (few readers have spotted this, because of the blonde/brunette difference).

Dear SWAK!

Glad to finally see Ms. Tree in her own magazine. It's nice to see a comic with an adult theme, as well as a P.I. theme, which is a welcome change from the usual superhero fare. The Private Eye Writers of America are proud of Collins & Beatty—both whom are members of PWA—for this innovation in both the comic and P.I. fields.

The story, although slow to start—and understandably so, since some fill-in was needed between the last chapter in **Eclipse**, and this first chapter of Ms. Tree's own magazine—did pick up pace, and I'll be looking forward to the developments in future issues.

As for a magazine as a whole, I think I'll wait for issue #2, with all the regular features, to comment on that. I will say this, however. The Frank Miller "Famous Detective Pin-Up" is a wonderful tribute to the most recognizable authors & P.I.s in the genre, and Mike Hammer was of course a fitting choice for number one. I hope Ms. Tree lives on for years to come, and maybe someday my own P.I. will qualify for "Famous Pinup" no. 100, or so.

BOB RANDISI, Brooklyn, NY

Bob Randisi's private eye is Miles Jacoby, whose solid debut (**Eye In The Ring**, Avon) is still on the stands: Bob is the

founder of the writers organization he mentions, the **Private Eye Writers of America**. He also writes the very successful **Gunsmith** western series, under the name J. R. Roberts.

Dear Max and Terry,

This second Ms. Tree novel—following the six-part "I, for an Eye" which helped launch **Eclipse** to success—is an improvement both in story and visual presentation. The new **Ms. Tree** is in color, much more preferable to me than the black and white of **Eclipse**. While there were some minor errors in the book—misdating **I, the Jury** (on the Frank Miller pin-up) as 1953 instead of 1947 and placing the chapters of the novels so that ending panels were not allowed to build the proper suspense—my overall reaction is one of total enjoyment.

Congratulations to you both and Dean Mullaney for putting out such a quality detective book, a type sorely missing recently and deserving of much success.

JIM TRAYLOR, Smyrna, GA

Jim, I agree that the three chapters would have been more effective separated by non-Ms. Tree pages (ad copy, SWAK, whatever); moving the debut of "The Scythe" to issue #2 necessitated moving Chapter Three of "Ms. Tree" up an issue—hence, the redundant material on the splash of that chapter, appropriate for the next issue, but not the next page. Editor Dean Mullaney wrote the copy for Miller's "Mike Hammer" pin-up, and mistakenly looked in a later edition of **I, the Jury**, so neither Collins nor Miller (Spillane fans both) need cop to the 1947 misdate. (Jim Traylor is a regular contributor to such mystery fanzines as **Armchair Detective** and **The Mystery Fancier**.)

Dear Eclipse,

Prior to the first issue of **Ms. Tree**, the last comic book I read was around the year Max Collins was born. He has done it again—first he got me hooked on his **Nolan** books. I wish there had been 20 in the series rather than 6. Then I was hooked on the 4 books in his **Quarry** series. Then at last, we mystery book fans got his first hardback novel, **The Baby Blue Rip-off**, in January 1983. His next book is not scheduled until June. This can be a long wait for a mystery book fan and collector. He and Terry Beatty have saved the day with **Ms. Tree**.

Thank you, Max and Terry, for not making her a "super hero" or "feminist" character. To quote Max's editorial in issue #1, "Ms. Tree is a feminist only in the way any modern intelligent working woman is likely to be." I am a modern, intelligent (hopefully), working woman and I think Ms. Tree is great. I did not find the pace too slow. I for one am most anxious for the next issue, when she confronts Dominic Muerta.

I have one small criticism. Make your "2-Minute Mystery" a bit more difficult. Any readers of your **NOLAN** and **QUARRY** series should have known the solution immediately as I did.

MRS. ESTELLE M. BLAIR, San Francisco, CA  
Mrs. Blair is obviously a mystery buff, and I'm not surprised she guessed last issue's "Mike Mist"—but it looks like our cliffhanger fooled her! Welcome to comic books, Estelle—Dean Mullaney will be sending you a copy of **John Law**, to introduce you to a newcomer name of Eisner (By way of

self-promotion: **The Baby Blue Rip-Off**, Walker, \$11.95, should be readily available at mystery book shops, signed copies can be ordered from dealer Robert Weinberg.)

Dear Max and Terry,

First, I'm a terminal fan of film noir and detective stories. A typical evening at our house sees Casey reading Nancy Drew, me reading Raymond Chandler, and Steve reading *Finnegan's Wake*. (We're gonna have to do something about that guy!) As an equally ardent Hammett fan, and therefore a lover of everything Maltese, I appreciate the fact that Ms. Tree's secretary is named Etta. And I adore the Spillane-tough style in which Ms. Tree talks. When Patrick asks her what she'll do when she finds the killer's employer, and she answers, "Kill the son of a bitch," thrills run down my spine.

Next, I'm also a hopeless Terry Beatty fan. What can I say about his style . . . I used to think it was Golden Age, but it's not really. It's just not Marvel or D C. superhero clone style, and it's been so long since I saw a comic where utterly unbelievable costumed jerks weren't punching each other out one every other page that Terry's style LOOKS Golden Age by comparison. I never had any trouble following Ms. Tree in **Eclipse**, but Terry Beatty in color, and all in one book, is even better.

The "Mike Mist 2-Minute Mist ery" was a riot, especially if one happens to know the people being gently satirized. I laughed out loud.

One last thing, Max. Stop feeling you have to deny Ms. Tree is a feminist. Of **course** she's a feminist! Any woman as intelligent, tough and independent as Michael is certainly a feminist. Didn't you know that feminists can be attractive and like sex?

TRINA ROBBINS, San Francisco, CA

Getting a positive response like this from Trina Robbins—possibly the foremost woman cartoonist of the day—is the highest praise we could hope for (The "Casey" Trina refers to is her daughter; and "Steve" is a fella named

Lelialola, some of you may be familiar with I For the less knowledgeable (scholarly Trina is also the co-author of a forthcoming book on women cartoonists), it should be pointed out that **our** Effie is named after Effie Perrine, Sam Spade's secretary. As for last issue's "Mike Mist" being a satire on actual persons, whatever could you be talking about, Trina? By the way, Terry thanks you for **not** capitalizing the word "hopeless"

Dear Terry and Max,

I was really excited to see the first issue of **Ms. Tree's Thrilling Detective Adventures** at my friendly neighborhood comic shop! I immediately added it to my collection of current comics.

I was most impressed by the characterization—rarely has a comic heroine—even in these days of “hero-angst”—actually gone into analysis—at least not while still functioning, as Ms. Tree admirable is.

Good, straight-ahead **storytelling**. I like the first-person narrative when the narrator is dynamic, as Ms. Tree is. The romance with Patrick seemed to happen a little bit quickly—maybe because of the swift scene changes during the course of a single conversation! Otherwise I liked the pacing very much.

Graphically—I really enjoyed the many close-ups—very cinematic. Small changes of expression can say so much—something I want to use in the process of turning my own sword 'n' sorcery novel into a comics series. Not just "thud and blunder"!

I'm looking forward to seeing how the story comes out—I'm a real mystery fan.

**BARB RAUSCH**, West Hollywood, CA  
A male writing first-person female narration is presumptuous to say the least; so I feel especially gratified (as does Terry) by the positive comments of women like Barb, Estelle and Trina. Talented Barb Rausch, incidentally, is one of the prime movers in the current KATY KEENE revival.

-MAC



# THE MIKE MIST MINUTE MIST-ERY

© 1962 by Max Collins and Terry Beatty

## DEATH IN THE DEEP END

RICH SIMMIAN and his wife IVA HAD THE MOST SUCCESSFUL SYNDICATED EXERCISE SHOW ON TV - BUT NOW IVA WAS -

DEAD!



L. DIMM HAD ASKED ME ALONG SINCE I WAS ON RETAINER FROM CONTINENTAL INSURANCE, WHOSE POLICY ON IVA WAS WORTH A FORTUNE...

SHE APPARENTLY CAME HOME INTOXICATED IN THE NIGHT, STAGGERED FROM HER CAR...



THESE FOOTPRINTS ARE DEEP - THE SPIKE HEELS DUG IN ESPECIALLY DEEP -

SHE WAS STAGGERING - THE GROUND WAS DAMP FROM THE RAIN, DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY...

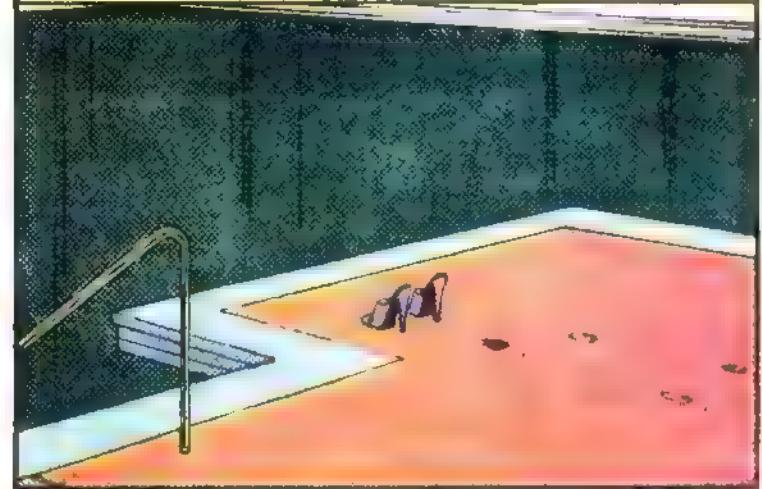


FINGERPRINTS ON THE SHOES - CONVICTED HIM. CASTS OF THE FADED FOOTPRINTS - THE SIMMIANS POOL, A SPIKE HEEL IN EITHER HAND, PLASTER SIMMIAN WALKED OUT HIS HANDS FROM CAR TO THE HOUSE FROM THE DRIVEWAY) ACROBATIC WHEELS. AFTER DROWNING HIS PLACE, NOT ON HER WOULD HAVE BEEN FORWARDED - HER WEIGHT A MERELY DAMP GROUND - HER WOULD NEVER LEAVE SUCH DEEP IMPRESSIONS IN SOLUTION: EVEN STAGGERING, THE SMALL IVA

I FOUND HER THIS MORNING - FLOATING IN THE POOL, IN THE DEEP - I PULLED HER OUT, BUT SHE WAS...

TAKE IT EASY, SIMMIAN.

"AND MADE HER WAY TO THE SWIMMING POOL, STEPPED OUT OF HER HIGH HEELS AND WENT FOR A DRUNKEN SWIM - AND DROWNED."



THIS IS CLEARLY ACCIDENTAL DEATH -

HARDLY. SIMMIAN KILLED HIS WIFE, AND I THINK WE CAN PROVE IT -



# THE SCYTHE

## "LOADED PISTOLS & LOADED DICE"

THEY THINK THEY  
CAN JUST KNOCK ONE  
OF US OFF IN THE  
MIDDLE OF AN  
INVESTIGATION.

THEY KILLED  
JOHNNY GARDENIA,  
AND CALLED IT A WARNING  
TO DETECTIVES  
EVERWHERE.

CREATOR/WRITER: DEAN MULLANEY  
PENCILLER: ELLIS GOODSON  
INKER: BRUCE MILLER  
LETTERER: CARRIE McCARTHY  
COLORIST: DENIS McFARLING  
EDITOR: CAT & YRON WODE

WITHOUT ANY  
REPRIBALS.

WELL, MAYBE  
THEY THINK JOHNNY'S  
FRIENDS WILL LAY OFF  
NOW. MAYBE THEY THINK  
THEY'VE SCARED US POOR  
TENDER-HEARTED GUM-  
SHOES OFF THE CASE.

BASTARDS!

THEY SAY THE FACE HAD JOHNNY KILLED, SO THIS WAS MORE COMPLICATED THAN I THOUGHT. THE FACE IS NOT EXACTLY YOUR LOCAL PETTY LARSENIST.

THE BUTTON MAN PULLED THE TRIGGER, BUT HE'S BEEN DOING THAT FOR THE FACE FOR QUITE SOME TIME NOW. NICE GUY, THE BUTTON MAN. REAL NICE.

JOHNNY WAS ON TO SOMETHING IMPORTANT. THE THING IS, IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN ME WHO WAS THERE, NOT JOHNNY.

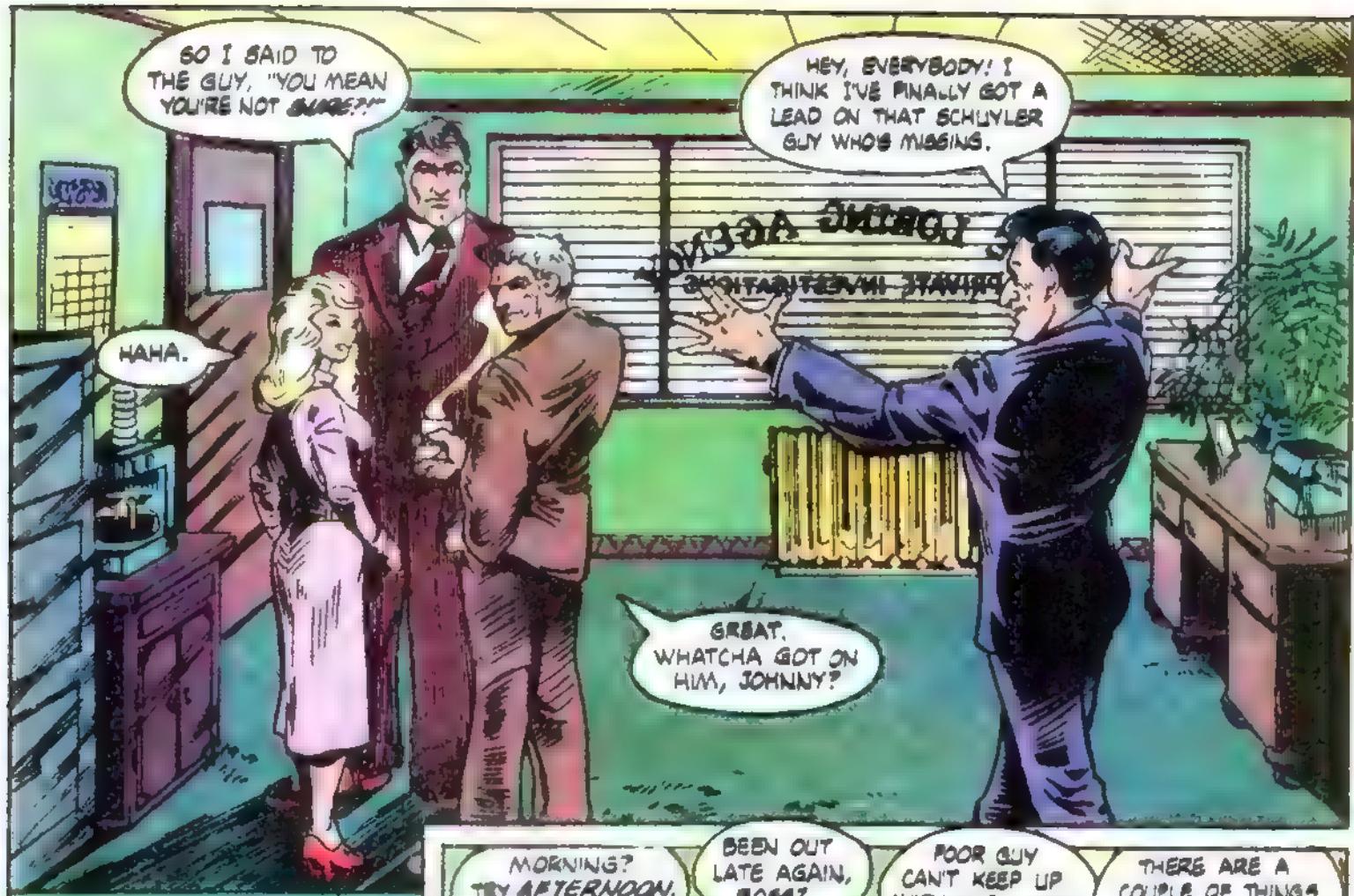
HE KNEW EXACTLY WHERE TO FIND JOHNNY. A PRIVATE DETECTIVE IS A SITTING DUCK FOR REVENGE.

UNLESS THEY DON'T KNOW WHO HE IS.

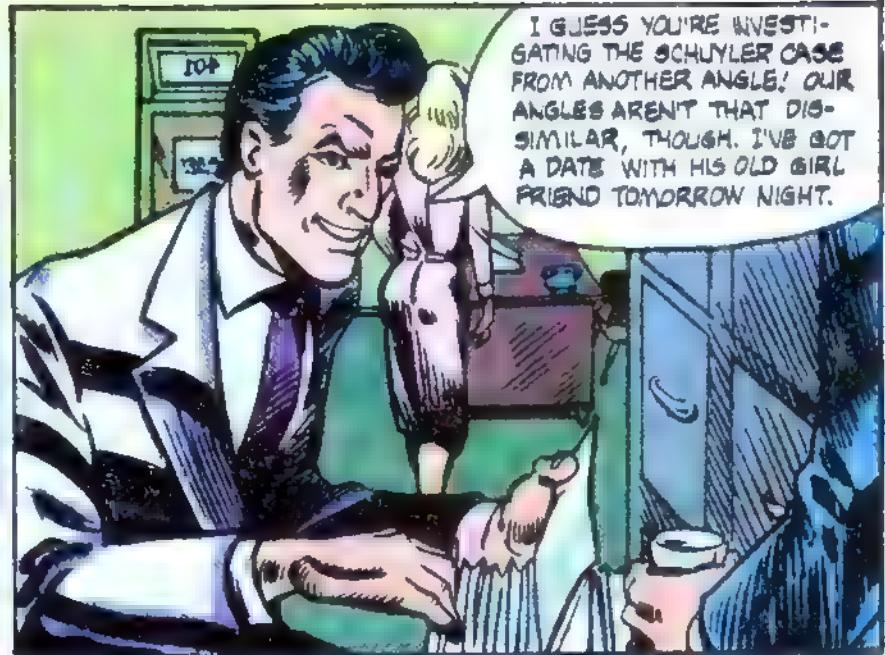
IF THEY CAN'T PUT A NAME ON ME, THEY WON'T KNOW WHOM TO STRIKE BACK AT.

AND I WON'T BE THE SITTING DUCK THAT JOHNNY WAS.

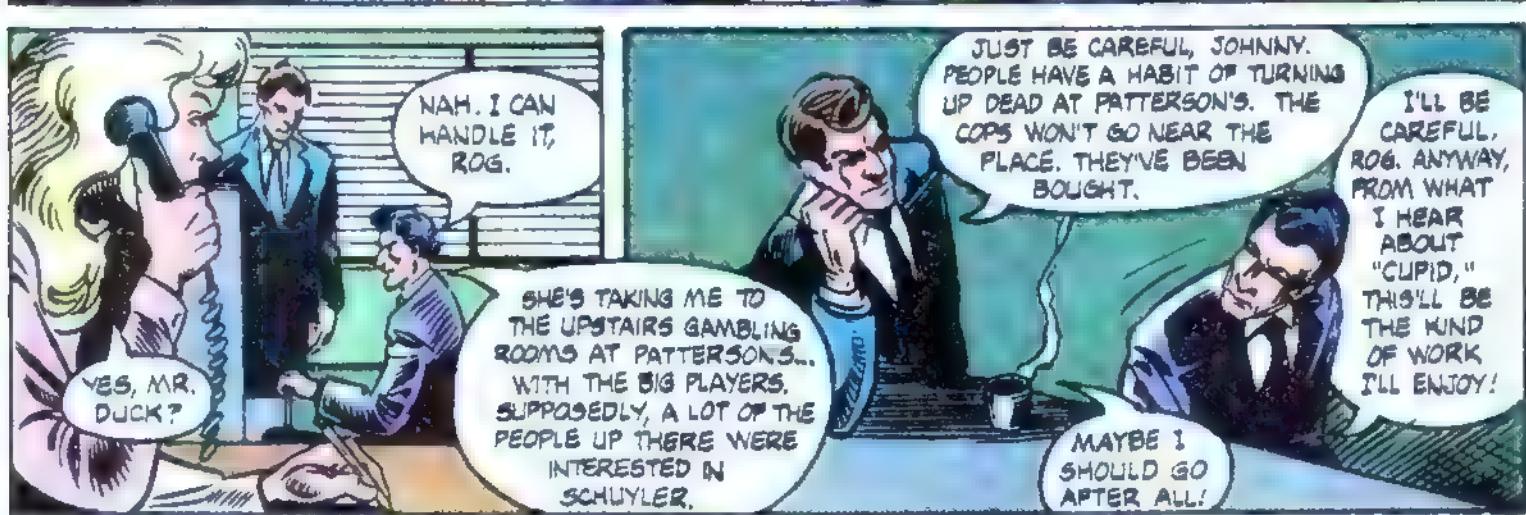
I REMEMBER THE LAST TIME I SAW HIM. IT WAS ONLY YESTERDAY AFTERNOON...



BY THE WAY, ROGER. YOUR "CHESS PARTNER," KATE SCHUYLER, CALLED. SHE SAID THAT AFTER YOU LEFT THIS MORNING, SHE REMEMBERED ABOUT SOME VISITORS TO HER BROTHER'S BAR NOT LONG AGO.



MAYBE I SHOULD GO SEE THIS "CUPID," JOHNNY. AFTER ALL, KATE SCHUYLER'S AN OLD FRIEND OF MINE, AND SHE DID ASK ME TO FIND HER BROTHER ALEX.

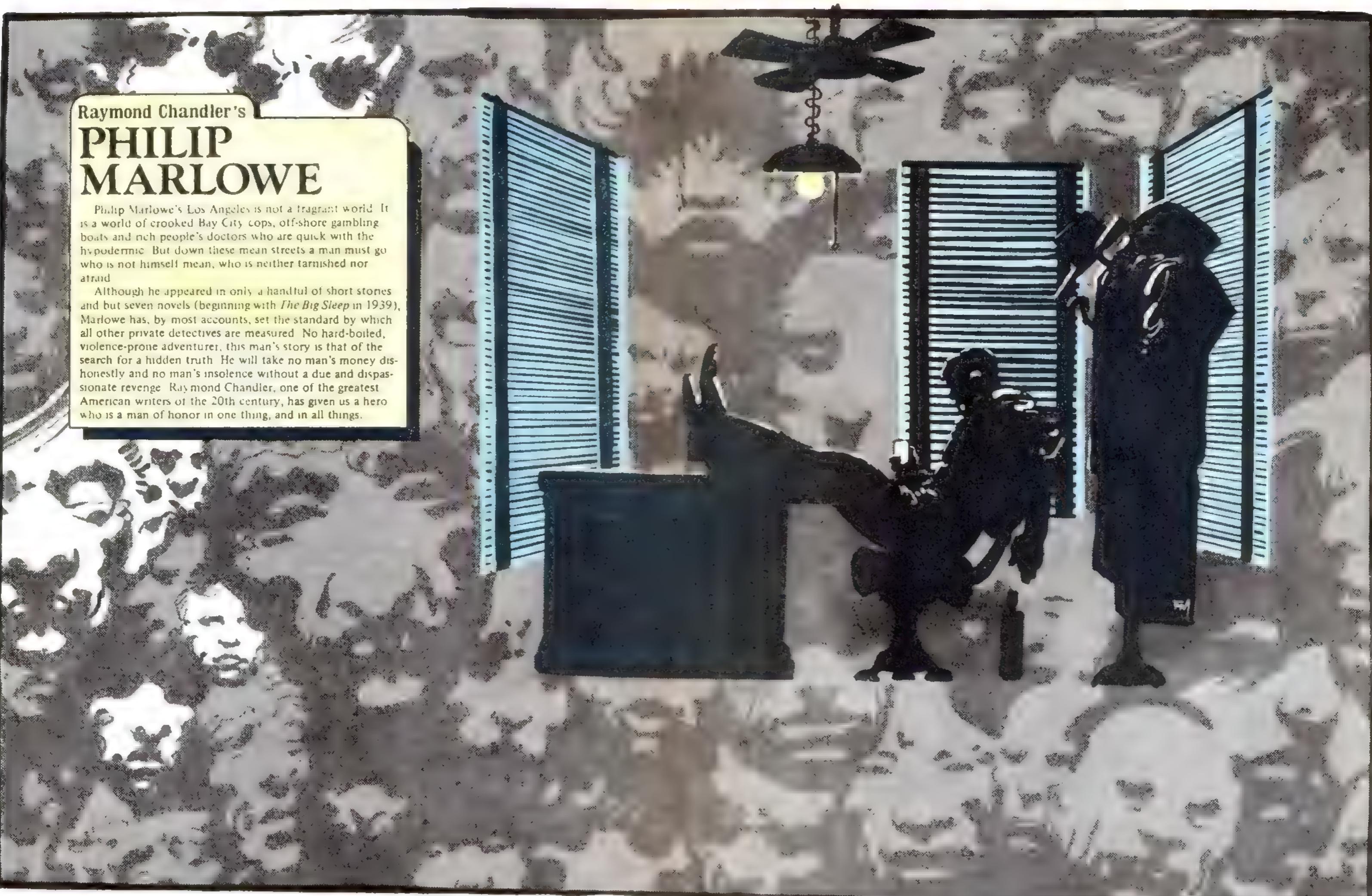


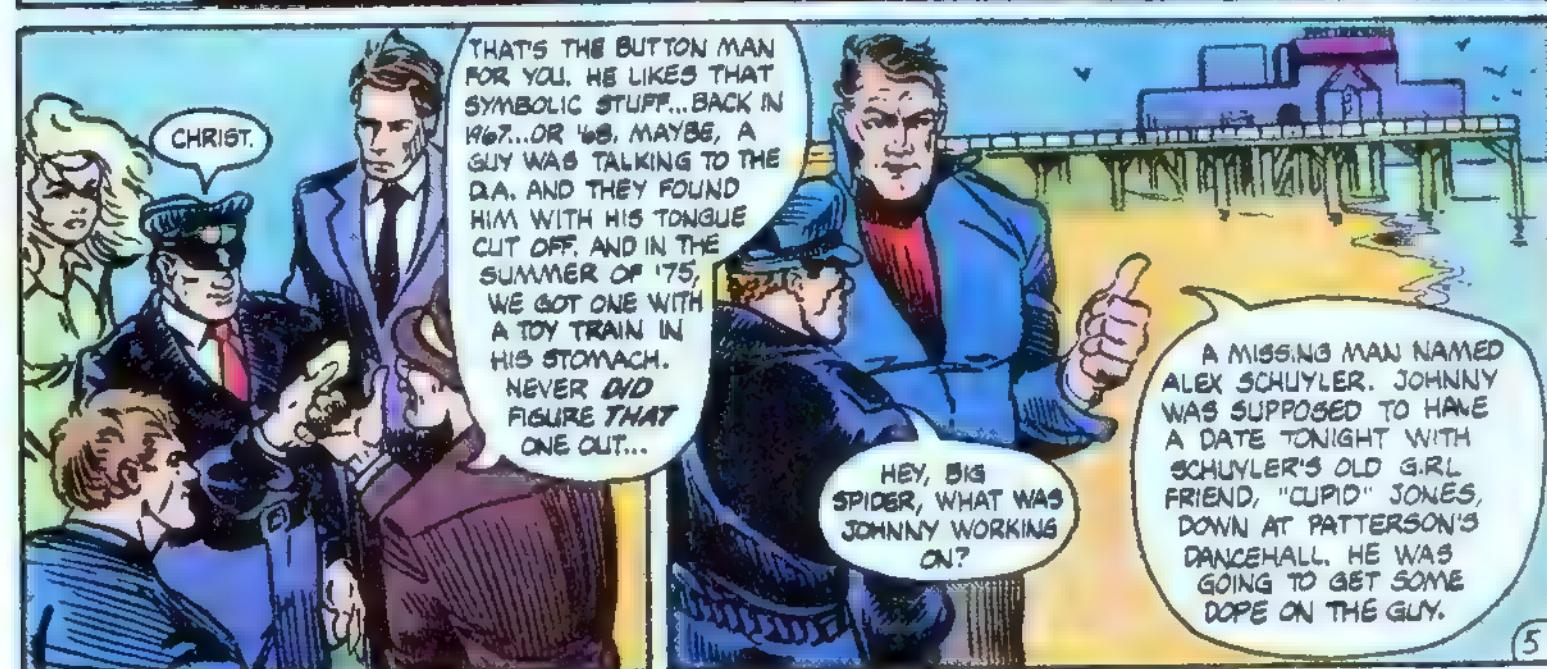
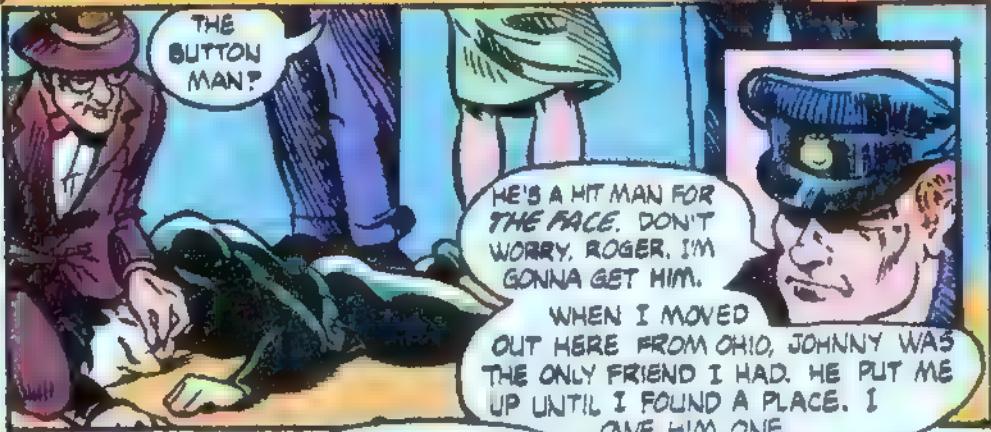
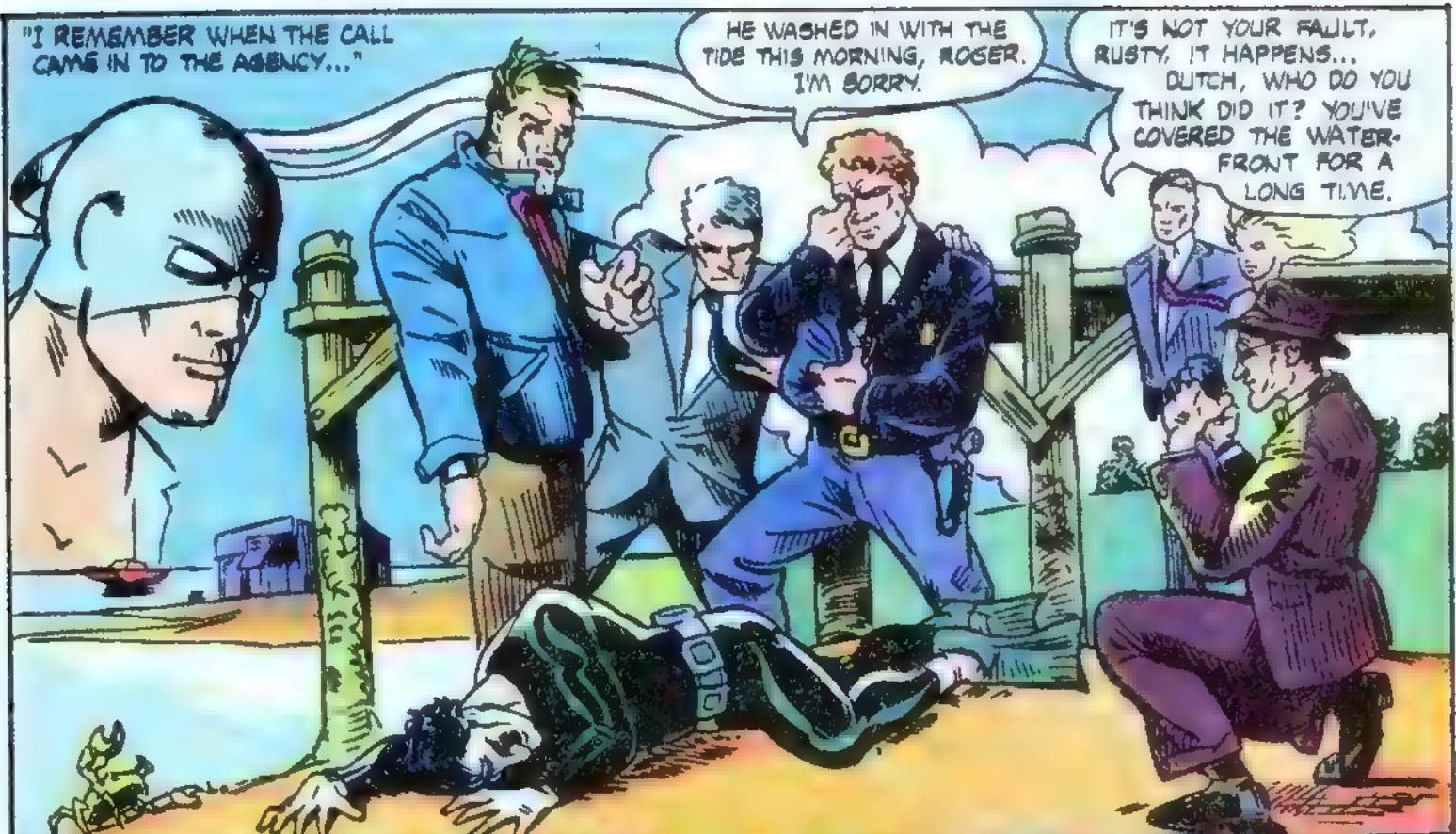
# Frank Miller's "Famous Detective Pin-Up" No. 2

## Raymond Chandler's **PHILIP MARLOWE**

Philip Marlowe's Los Angeles is not a fragrant world. It is a world of crooked Bay City cops, off-shore gambling boats and rich people's doctors who are quick with the hypodermic. But down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid.

Although he appeared in only a handful of short stories and but seven novels (beginning with *The Big Sleep* in 1939), Marlowe has, by most accounts, set the standard by which all other private detectives are measured. No hard-boiled, violence-prone adventurer, this man's story is that of the search for a hidden truth. He will take no man's money dishonestly and no man's insolence without a due and dispassionate revenge. Raymond Chandler, one of the greatest American writers of the 20th century, has given us a hero who is a man of honor in one thing, and in all things.





THREE YEARS AGO, THIS BUILDING WAS CALLED "PIER 41", AND IT HOSTED RATS, FIELD MICE AND BROKEN GLASS. TONIGHT, IT IS CALLED PATTERSON'S DANCEHALL AND IT IS A PLACE WHERE THE UNDERWORLD CAN MEET THE ELITE, WHERE BIG CITY POLITICIANS DANCE CHEEK TO CHEEK WITH CRIMINALS WHO HAVE ENOUGH MONEY, AND INFLUENCE, TO CREATE SUCH A HAVEN.

THE OLD PIER HAS BEEN COMPLETELY REMODELLED, AND WHERE ONCE SWEATING LONGSHOREMEN UNLOADED WOODEN CRATES, GIRL SINGERS NOW WARBLE GERSHWIN TUNES.

BUT THE HARBOR VIEW AND STYLISH MUSIC AREN'T THE ONLY ATTRACTIONS. THE UPPER FLOORS, NOT YET REFURBISHED, OFFER OTHER INVITATIONS...

IT'S HERE THAT DETECTIVE RUSTY BRACES GOES THAT SAME NIGHT...WITH AN ARROW IN HIS SHEATH, AND SOME GOOD SCOTCH IN HIS BELLY...

EXCUSE ME, SIR...

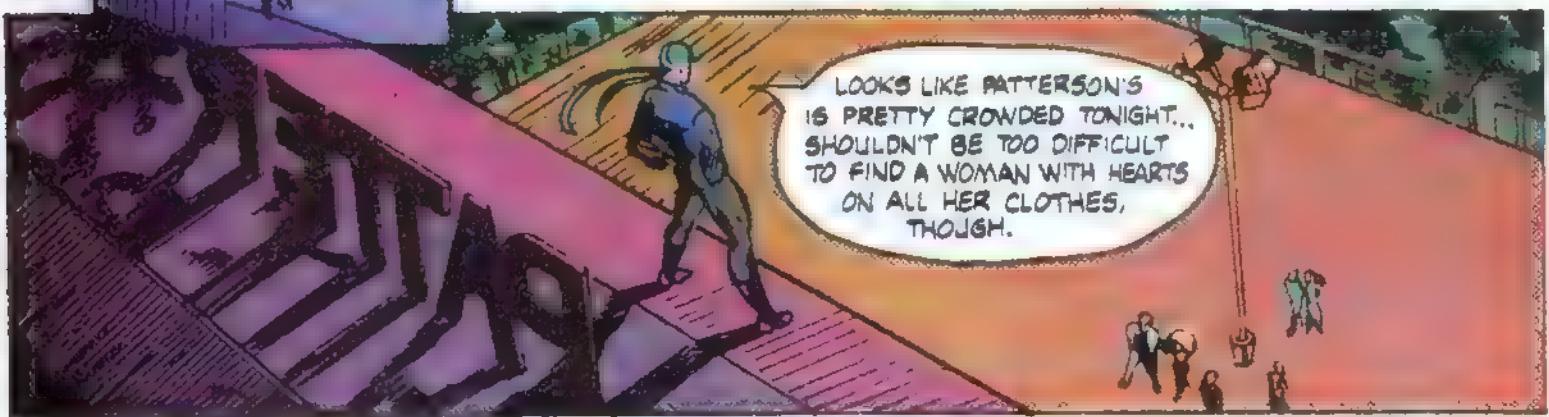
BE RIGHT BACK, BABE...

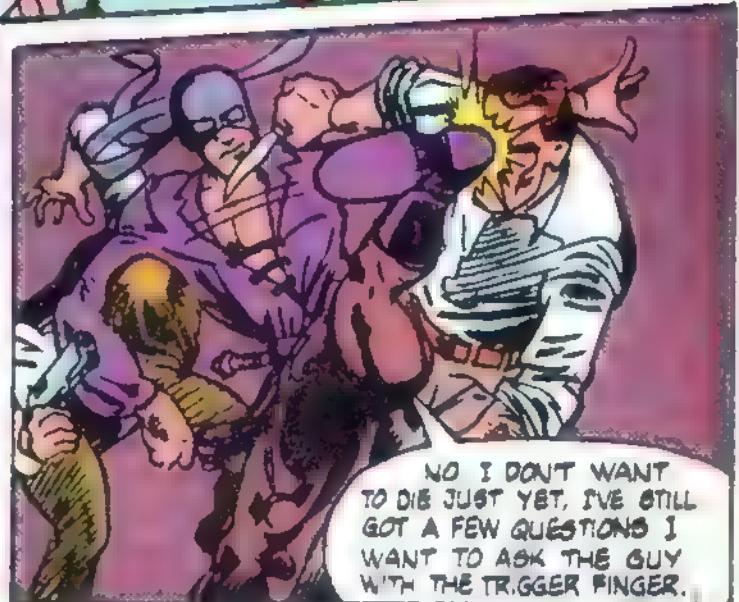
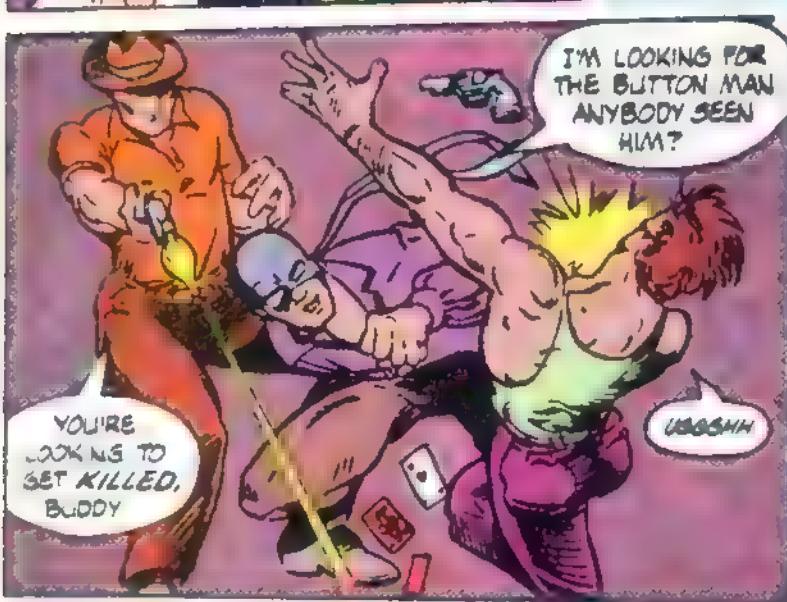
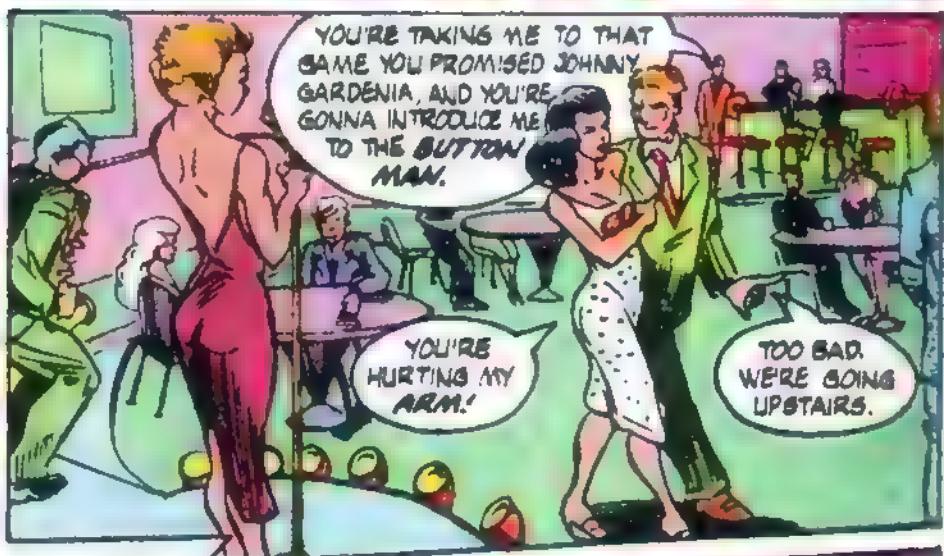
THE GUN, PLEASE...

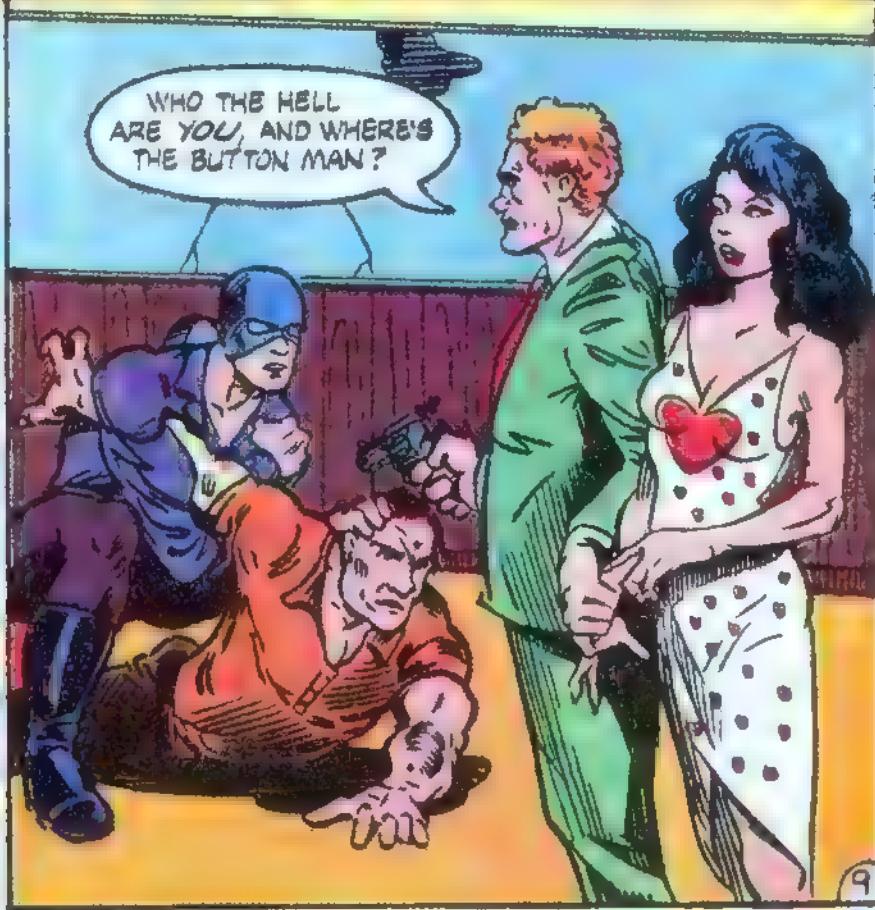
STICK IT, CHUM.

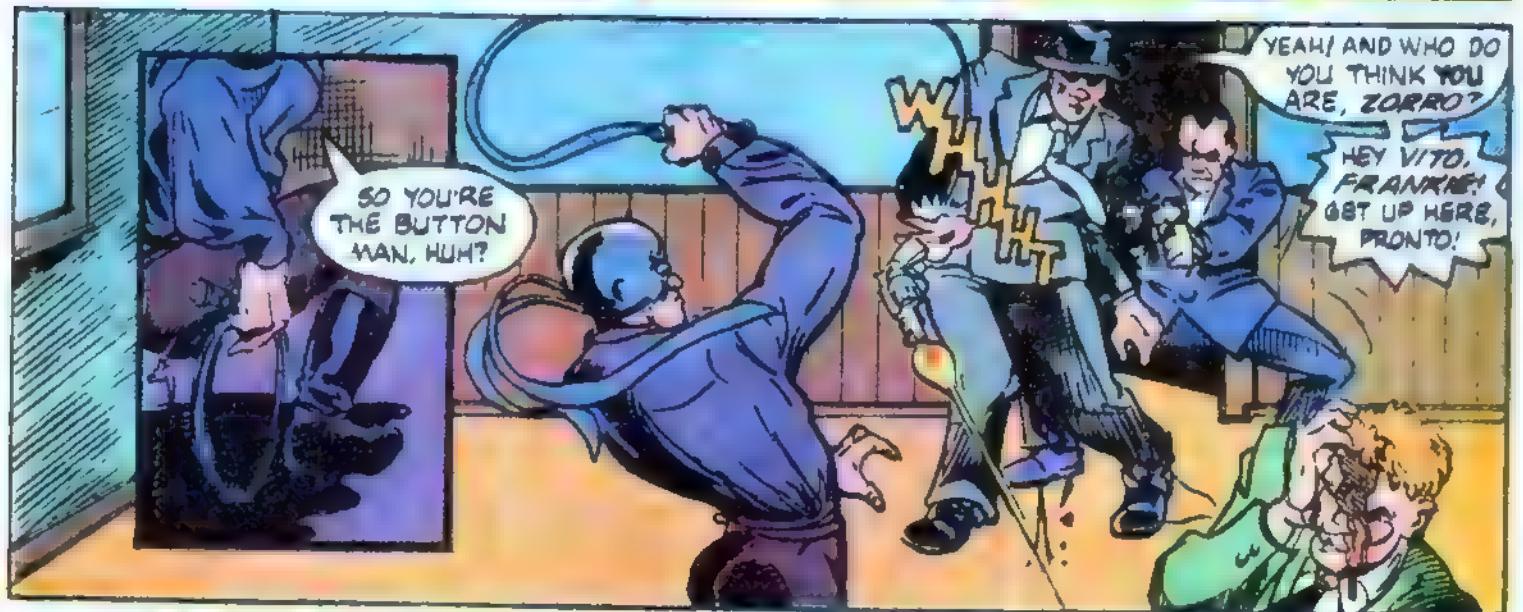
IT'S OKAY, VINCENT. DETECTIVE BRACES WON'T BOTHER US, WILL HE?

LET'S SEE..."CUPID." BIG SPIDER BECK SAID HER NAME WAS "CUPID" JONES. OKAY, MISS CUPID JONES...SHOW YOUR MUG SO I CAN BUST IT IN FOR YOU. JOHNNY WOULD LIKE THAT, WOULDN'T YOU, JOHNNY?









YOU'LL BE OKAY. YOU  
SHOULD HAVE KNOWN  
BETTER, THOUGH. DRINKING  
ON THE JOB, HUH? WHAT'LL  
THEY THINK OF NEXT?

WHO ARE  
YOU?

AH...JUST  
ANOTHER FRIEND  
OF JOHNNY  
GARDENIA'S.

IT'S NOT GOING  
TO BE EASY  
GETTING BACK  
THERE AGAIN.  
THEY'LL BE  
LOOKING FOR  
ME, AND THAT'S  
IT, THEY'LL BE  
LOOKING FOR  
THE SCYTHE,  
AND THEY  
WON'T KNOW  
WHERE TO  
LOOK

THE BUTTON MAN  
SEEMED AWFULLY  
PROTECTIVE OF "CUPID"  
JONES, TOO. I WONDER  
WHAT GIVES.

I'VE ALSO GOT TO  
FIND OUT WHY THEY  
CRAMMED JOHNNY  
INTO A SCUBA  
OUTFIT..DAMN.

I'LL GET THEM FOR  
YOU, JOHNNY. DON'T WORRY,  
THOSE BASTARDS ARE  
GOING TO PAY.

WHERE'S ALEX SCHUYLER? WHAT'S CUPID'S  
SECRET? FIND OUT NEXT ISSUE AS WE  
COME FACE TO FACE WITH... **THE FACE!**

Ms

# TREE

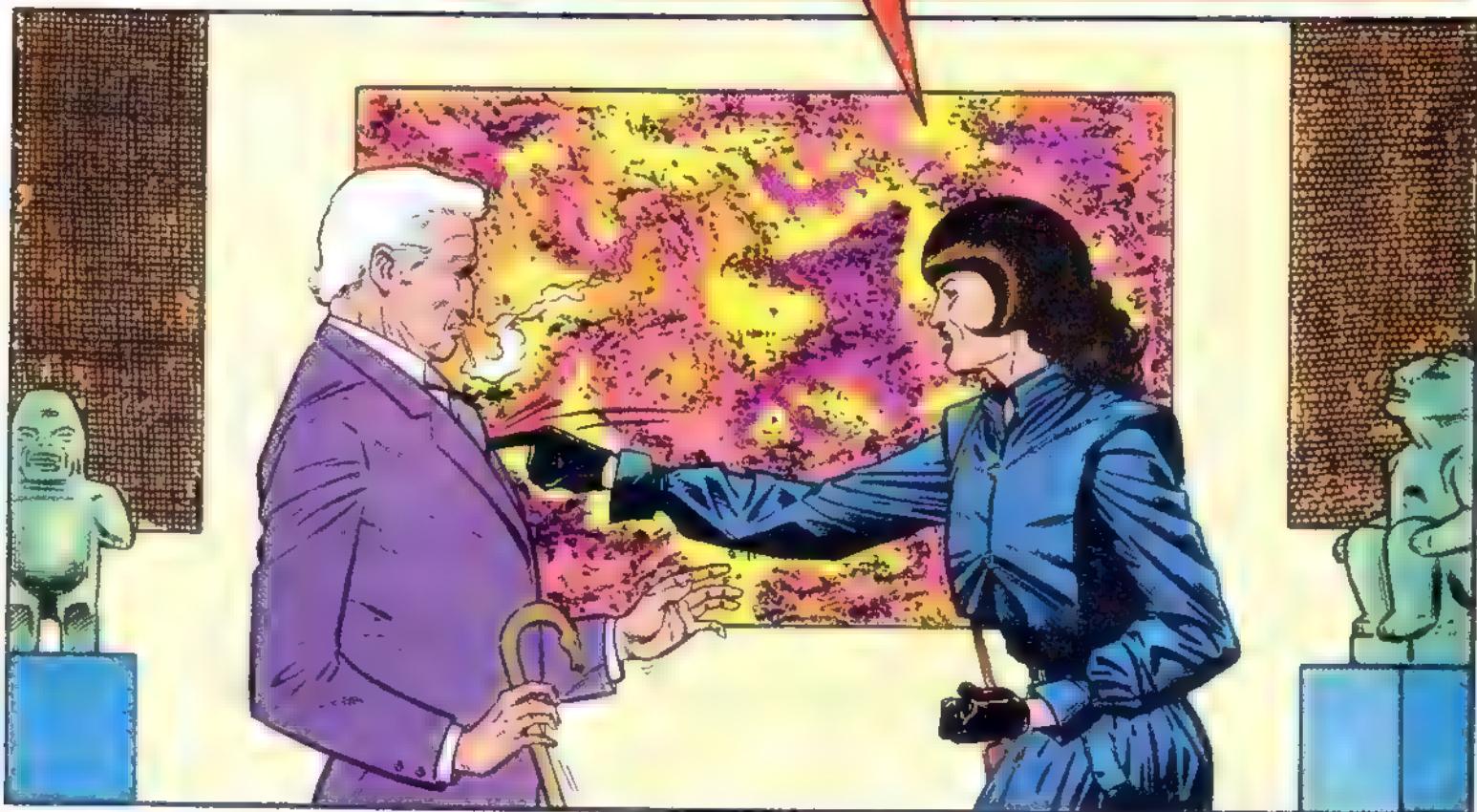
"DEATH DO US PART"

by Max Collins and Terry Beatty

Chapter  
Five

© 1983,  
Max Collins  
and  
Terry Beatty

## SOMEBODY TRIED TO KILL ME !

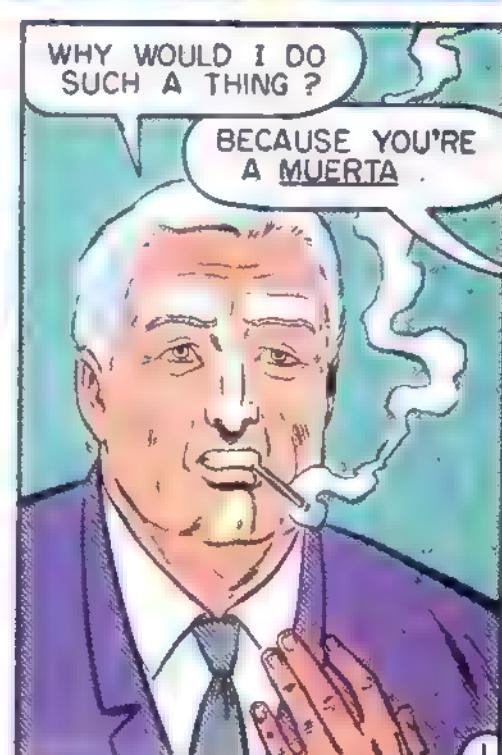
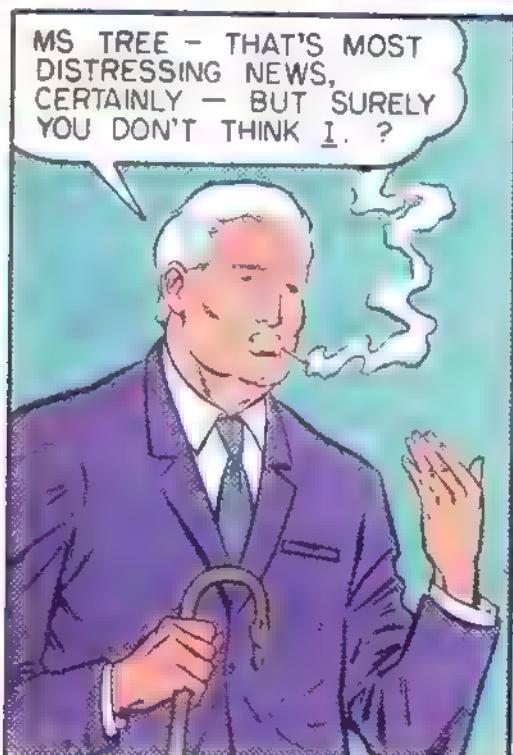


MS TREE - THAT'S MOST DISTRESSING NEWS, CERTAINLY - BUT SURELY YOU DON'T THINK I. ?

YOU - YOU COULD HAVE SET ME UP, YES... ASCERTAINED I WAS IN THE BUILDING - LEFT FOR YOUR PINE BEACH ALIBI -

WHY WOULD I DO SUCH A THING ?

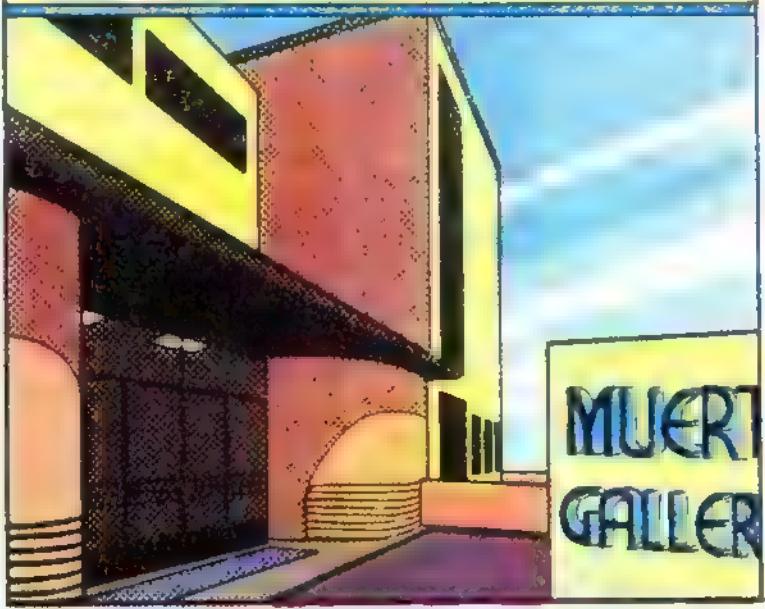
BECAUSE YOU'RE A MUERTA .



BECAUSE YOU AND YOUR BROTHER DOMINIC KNOW I'M OUT TO GET HIM, ANY WAY I CAN — BECAUSE YOU ONLY PRETEND TO BE ALOOF FROM YOUR BROTHER AND HIS BUSINESS —



"YOUR BUSINESS — THIS ART GALLERY OF YOURS — IS A PERFECT FRONT FOR DRUG TRAFFICKING, AFTER ALL — LIKE YOUR BROTHER'S TRUCKING FIRM."



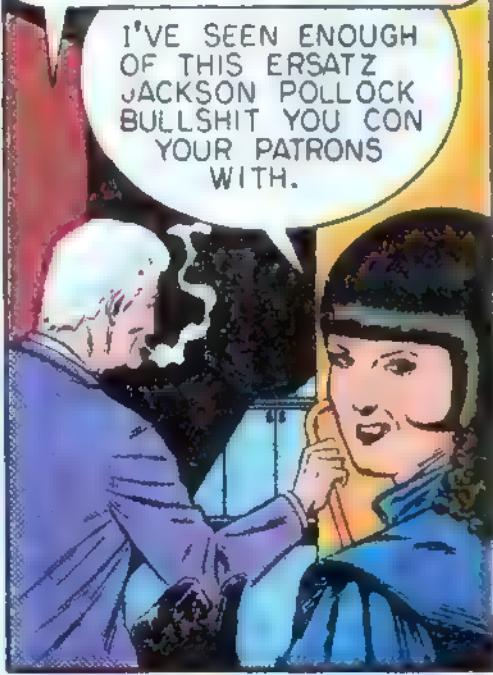
THIS LITTLE PIECE COMES FROM MEXICO, FOR EXAMPLE. GET MY DRIFT?



MS. TREE — PLEASE — COME TO MY OFFICE — SOME PRIVACY, PLEASE...



THERE'S A PAINTING IN HERE I'D LIKE YOU TO SEE.



THE PAINTING I WANT YOU TO SEE IS NOT IN THAT CATEGORY —

YOUR WIFE?



"YES — DEAD SOME FIFTEEN YEARS, NOW. MY BROTHER, INDIRECTLY, WAS RESPONSIBLE. AS YOU CAN SEE, MY DAUGHTER WAS THE IMAGE OF HER MOTHER — TO HAVE LOST THEM BOTH..."



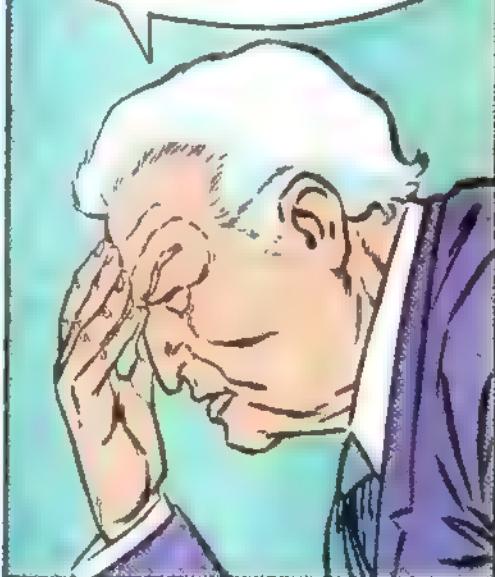
MS. TREE, THERE WAS A TIME WHEN I WAS INVOLVED IN MY BROTHER'S BUSINESS — THE PRESSURE OF IT KILLED MY WIFE. AND I WALKED AWAY FROM DOMINIC, AND HIS BLOOD MONEY.



BUT THIS BUSINESS — EXCUSE ME FOR SAYING SO — THIS BUSINESS OF YOURS WAS BUILT ON THAT BLOOD MONEY.



YES — AND I'M AFRAID IT'S COME BACK TO HAUNT ME — I'M AFRAID MY DAUGHTER MAY BE DEAD BECAUSE OF IT.



"YOU SEE," FRANCESCO MUERTA SAID, "HER FIANCÉ — OR I SHOULD SAY NEWLYWED HUSBAND — WAS AN ASKAM — AND THE ASKAMS ARE A FAMILY IN FLORIDA ONCE ALIGNED WITH THE MUERTAS IN THE DRUG SMUGGLING TRADE."



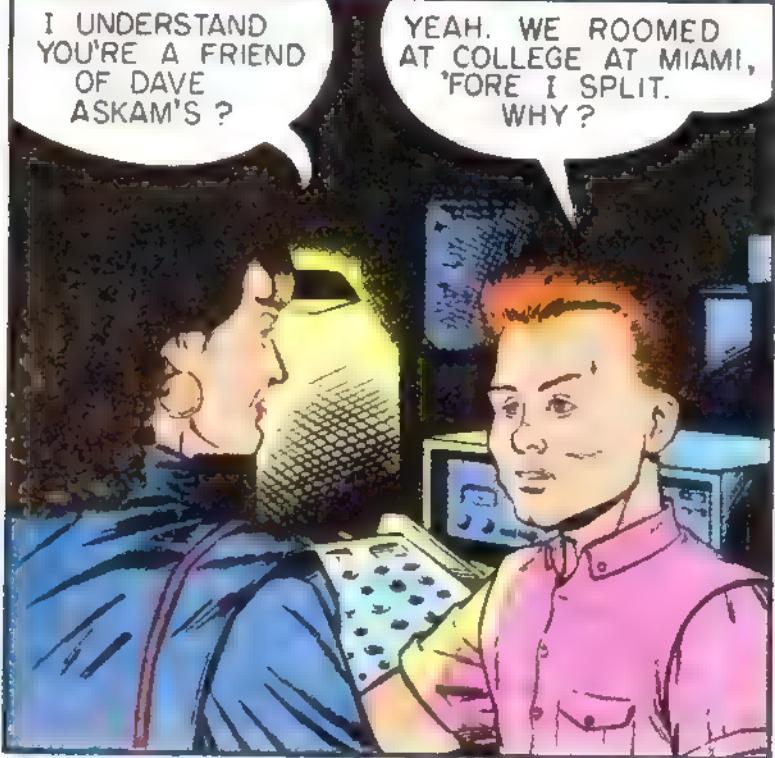
IS JIMMY PLUGG AROUND?

SURE — HE'S ME. GOT SOMETHIN' IN MIND, BABE? I GOT A SOUND CHECK TO RUN.



I UNDERSTAND YOU'RE A FRIEND OF DAVE ASKAM'S?

YEAH. WE ROOMED AT COLLEGE AT MIAMI, 'FORE I SPLIT. WHY?



AND YOU'RE WORKING NOW AS A ROADIE WITH ROCK BANDS...

I'M A SOUND MAN, YEAH. WHAT'S THIS ABOUT? HOW DO YOU KNOW ABOUT ME AND DAVE? WHO ARE YOU, LADY?

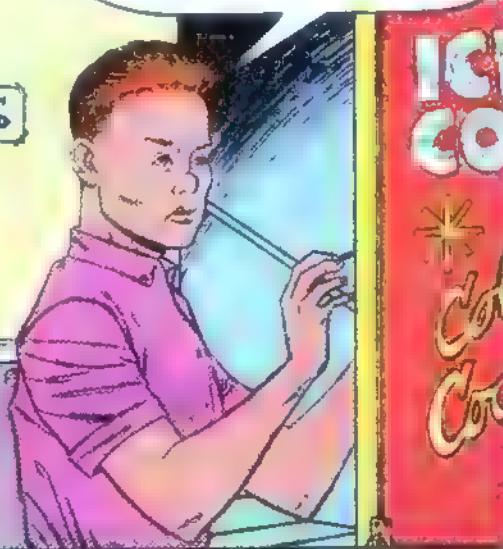


FRANCESCO MUERTA TOLD ME YOU WERE BEST MAN AT THE WEDDING OF HIS DAUGHTER AND ASKAM, TWO DAYS AGO.

THAT'S RIGHT - THEY PLANNED IT FOR WHEN I HAD A GIG IN THE CITY, SO I WAS ABLE TO STAND UP WITH DAVE. SO?

YOU KNEW HIM PRETTY WELL, I TAKE IT.

LADY, WHO THE HELL ARE YOU. WHAT DO YOU MEAN, "KNEW"?



DIDN'T YOU KNOW HE WAS DEAD?

DEAD?



CHRIST, LADY - YOU MUST'VE TAKEN TACT LESSONS FROM JOHNNY ROTTEN -



SORRY, ASKAM AND HIS WIFE WERE MURDERED NIGHT BEFORE LAST. SHOTGUNNED.

JESUS, I THINK I'M GOING TO BE SICK -



WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT DAVE AND HIS FAMILY?

THEY WERE TIGHT.



WAS DAVE GOING INTO THE FAMILY BUSINESS?



HEY, BABE - THIS IS GETTING A LITTLE HEAVY...

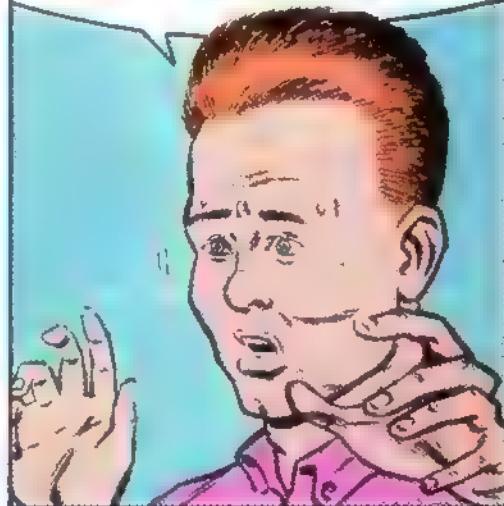
YOU'RE IN SHOW BIZ - MAYBE YOU'VE HEARD THE EXPRESSION "YOU AIN'T SEEN NOTHIN' YET -"



LOOK, BITCH - BACK OFF!  
NOBODY PUSHES JIMMY  
PLUGG AROUND -

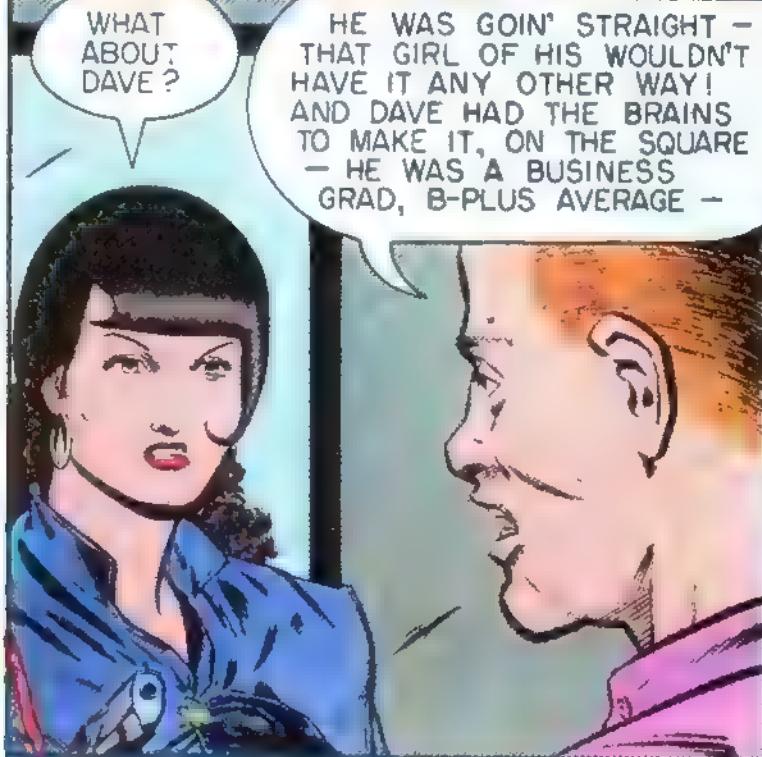


TAKE IT EASY, HONEY -  
OKAY, DAVE AND ME, WE DID  
SOME DEALING FOR HIS  
OLD MAN... SOME RUNS UP  
FROM MEXICO, BY BOAT  
MOSTLY - BUT IT WAS KID  
STUFF. I STILL DO A  
LITTLE DEALIN', OKAY?



WHAT  
ABOUT  
DAVE?

HE WAS GOIN' STRAIGHT -  
THAT GIRL OF HIS WOULDN'T  
HAVE IT ANY OTHER WAY!  
AND DAVE HAD THE BRAINS  
TO MAKE IT, ON THE SQUARE  
- HE WAS A BUSINESS  
GRAD, B-PLUS AVERAGE -



HEY, YOU WANT  
TO COME IN AND  
DO YOUR JOB,  
SHIT-FOR-BRAINS?

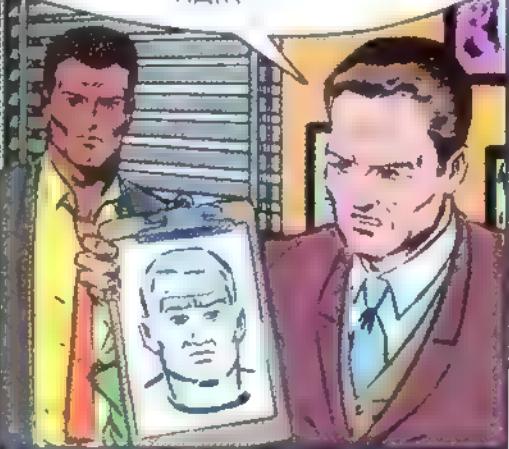
IS IT  
OKAY?

SURE - BUT  
KEEP IN  
MIND NOBODY  
PUSHES  
JIMMY PLUGG  
AROUND...



AT POLICE HQ THAT AFTER-  
NOON, I MET WITH SGT.  
VALER, AND CAPTAIN MEYERS  
OF THE B.C.I.

THIS IS THE SKETCH OUR  
ARTIST WORKED UP OF THE  
KILLER AS HE MIGHT LOOK  
WITHOUT BEARD AND CURLY  
HAIR -

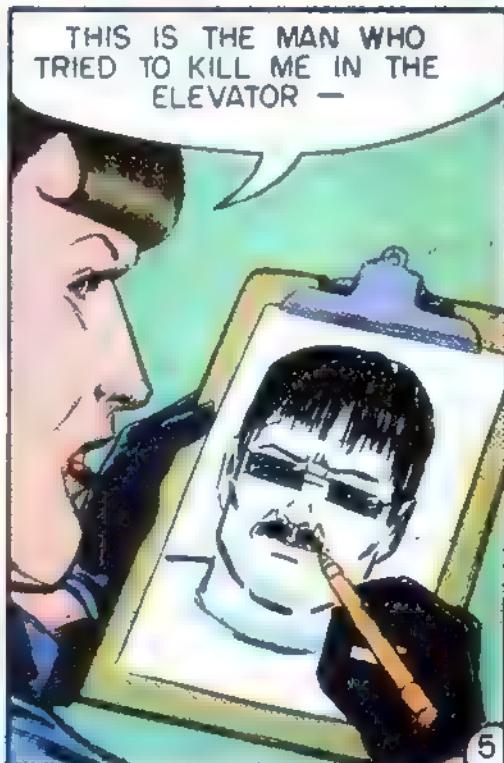


IS THIS A COPY?  
CAN I MARK IT  
UP?

SURE.



THIS IS THE MAN WHO  
TRIED TO KILL ME IN THE  
ELEVATOR -



THE SAME MAN TRIED  
TO KILL YOU THE VERY  
NEXT DAY AFTER THE  
HONEYMOON KILLING... ?

THAT'S  
INSANITY !  
WHY WOULD  
HE DO SUCH  
A THING ?

YOU'RE SIMPLY A  
BYSTANDER - A  
WITNESS WHO SAW  
NOTHING EXCEPT A  
KILLER-IN-DISGUISE

UNLESS HE'S IN THE  
HIRE OF DOMINIC  
MUERTA - WHO  
MIGHT FIGURE ME TO  
GET INVOLVED



MEANING MUERTA HIRED HIS  
OWN NIECE'S DEATH ?  
HARD TO BUY STILL, THE  
GUN THE KILLER LEFT IN  
THE ELEVATOR WAS A  
PROFESSIONAL'S TOOL  
MAYBE THIS IS A  
MOB-RELATED KILL.

A PRIVATE DETECTIVE CAN  
LOSE A LICENSE OVER  
WHAT I DID NEXT: I  
WITHHELD THE ASKAM  
INFORMATION

WELL, KEEP DIGGING, GENTS  
- YOU MAY COME UP WITH  
SOMETHING.

SEE TO IT  
YOU DON'T,  
MS TREE.  
YOU'RE A  
WITNESS  
IN THIS,  
NOTHING  
MORE.

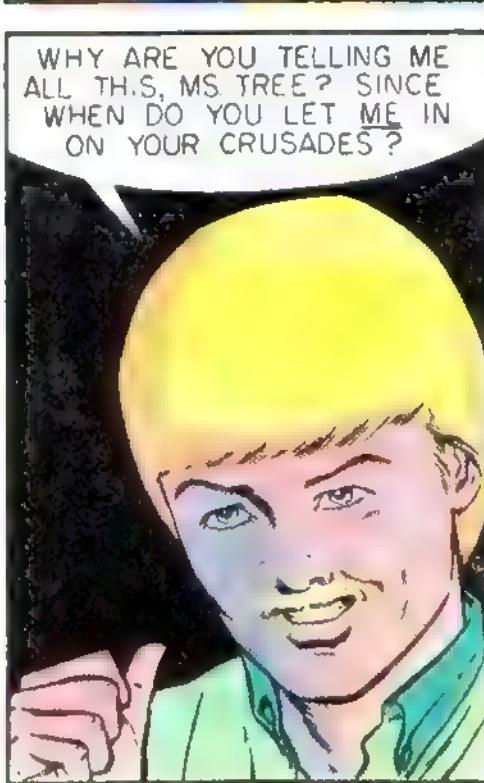
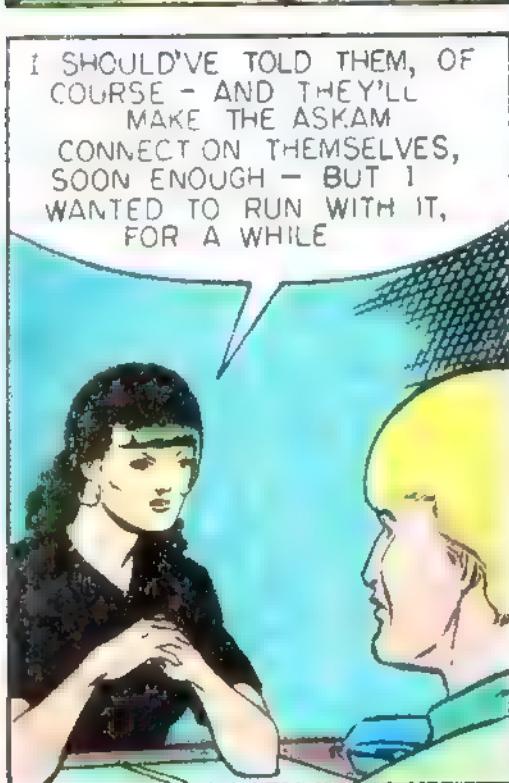
WE'LL NOTIFY  
YOU IF OUR  
NATIONAL  
CHECKS IDENTIFY  
THE HITMAN.



I SHOULD'VE TOLD THEM, OF  
COURSE - AND THEY'LL  
MAKE THE ASKAM  
CONNECT ON THEMSELVES,  
SOON ENOUGH - BUT I  
WANTED TO RUN WITH IT,  
FOR A WHILE

WHY ARE YOU TELLING ME  
ALL THIS, MS TREE? SINCE  
WHEN DO YOU LET ME IN  
ON YOUR CRUSADES ?

WE'VE GOT A PAYING  
CUSTOMER ON THIS ONE,  
DAN: FRANCESCO MUERTA  
HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO  
GO TO FLORIDA ?



I SPENT THE REST OF THE AFTERNOON ON THE PHONE, GETTING BACKGROUND INFORMATION FROM POLICE REPORTER J.M. AYDER OF THE MIAMI HERALD -



THEN I CAUGHT UP WITH DAN, WHO WAS ALREADY AT THE AIRPORT -

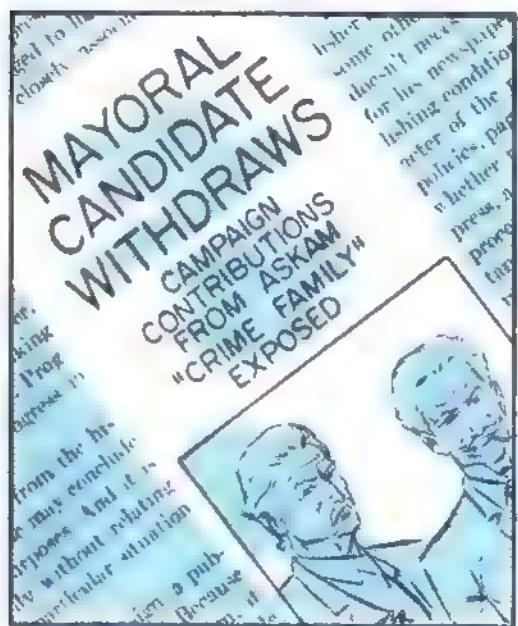
J.M.'LL FILL YOU IN, IN DETAIL, AT THE HERALD; BUT HERE'S THE BASIC OUTLINE...



"THE ASKAM BROTHERS - JOHN 'THE FOX' AND ROBERT 'THE WOLF' ASKAM - WERE AMONG DOMINIC MUERTA'S TOP DOPE SUPPLIERS THROUGHOUT THE 'SIXTIES AND 'SEVENTIES."



"BUT THE ASKAMS GOT EMBROILED IN LOCAL POLITICAL SCANDALS, AROUND '76 -"



"AND THEN A GANG WAR WITH THE EMERGING LATIN MOB Factions CREATED, WELL.. MUCHO BAD PUBLICITY."



AFTER WHICH, DOMINIC MUERTA APPARENTLY BROKE WITH THE ASKAMS - WHO HAVE DECLINED IN POWER ACCORDINGLY.



"LATEST DEVELOPMENT WAS LAST SUMMER, WHEN ROBERT ASKAM - DAVE'S UNCLE - WAS KILLED IN HIS OWN HOME. HOW THAT FITS IN, IF IT DOES, ISN'T KNOWN."



WHO DO YOU WANT ME TO TALK TO, MS. TREE?

ANYBODY IN THE ASKAM ORGANIZATION YOU CAN GET TO - JOHN ASKAM HIMSELF, IF YOU CAN PULL IT OFF.



OH, AND DAN - TRY NOT TO GET KILLED.

SEE WHAT I CAN DO BOSS -



WHEN I GOT HOME, AROUND SEVEN, THERE  
WAS A MESSAGE ON MY ANSWER MACHINE -

MICHAEL, THIS IS PATRICK -  
I'M IN TOWN, WRESTLING  
WITH MY PUBLISHER -  
STILL ON FOR TONIGHT?



PATRICK? MICHAEL, I  
SURE COULD USE A  
NIGHT OUT - BEATS  
OPENING UP A CAN OF  
SOUP AT HOME.  
OF COURSE I  
LIKE CHICAGO-STYLE  
PIZZA!



YOU KNOW WHAT I  
LIKE ABOUT TAKING  
YOU OUT TO  
DINNER?

NO,  
WHAT?



SINCE YOU'RE A PRIVATE  
EYE, AND I'M A MYSTERY  
WRITER, THIS IS RESEARCH -  
HENCE, DEDUCTABLE.



YOU KNOW, I  
DUG OUT ONE  
OF YOUR  
NOVELS FROM  
MY HUSBAND'S  
BOX OF  
PAPERBACKS.

HOPE  
IT WAS  
HITMAN  
#21 -  
THAT'S MY  
FINEST  
HOUR.

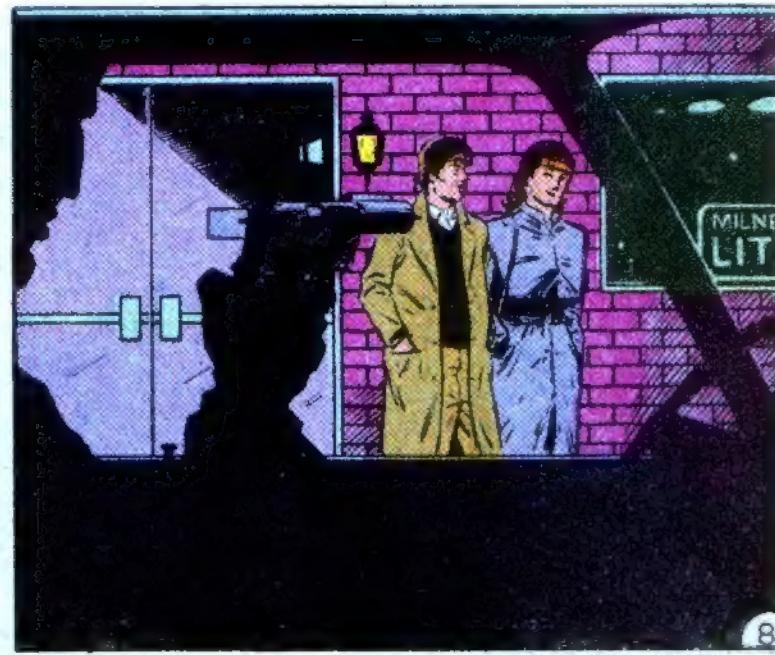


LOOK - ARE YOU DOING  
ALL RIGHT? I HOPE MY  
FLIP ATTITUDE DOESN'T  
SEEM CALLOUS, AFTER  
THAT... TRAGEDY AT PINE  
BEACH.

NOT AT ALL.  
YOU'RE JUST  
WHAT THE  
DOCTOR  
ORDERED.

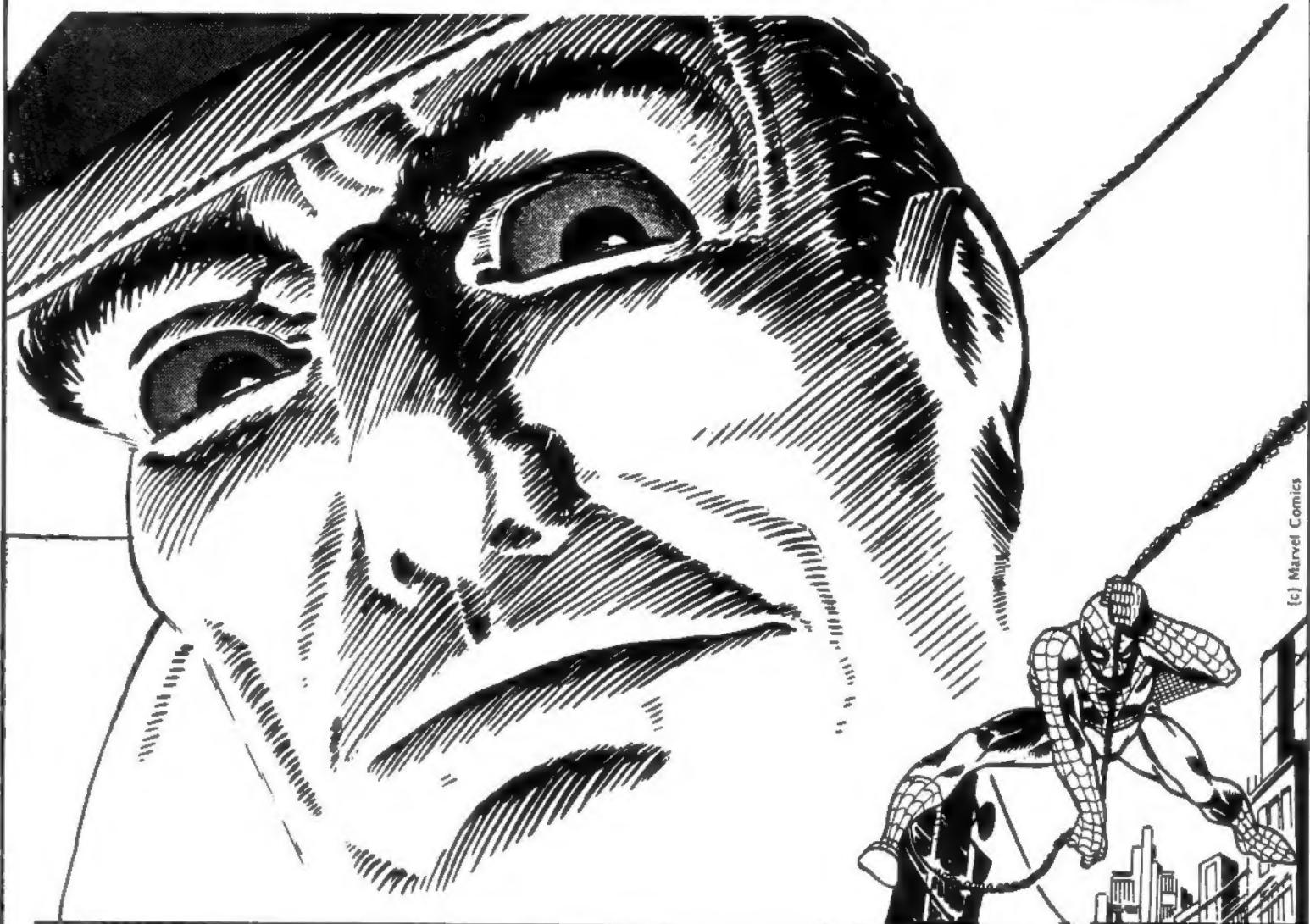


"GOOD," PATRICK SAID. "NOW, WHY DON'T  
WE GO SEE WHAT'S PLAYING AT YOUR  
APARTMENT..."



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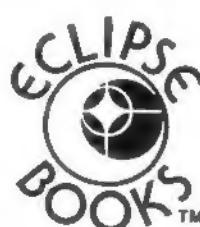
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